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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

EDITED BY

JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.

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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

EDITED BY THE REV.

JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.

EDITOR OF
'THE EXPOSITORY TIMES,' 'THE DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE'
'THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS'
AND OTHER WORKS

ASSISTED BY
REV. E. HASTINGS, M.A.
A. W. HASTINGS, M.A.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

VOLUME I

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The aim of THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE is to preserve all that is worth preserving of the modern interpretation of the Bible. It is the thought rather than the expression that is retained, though the expression has not been rejected when it seemed worthy. So much, however, has been done in the way of condensing, re-arranging, re-writing, adding to, and illustrating, that the sources have not as a rule been given. But so far as these are published sermons, they will be found in the Index to Modern Sermons which accompanies each volume. THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE contains also much that is new, written by the Editor and others.

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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

INTRODUCTION

THE incidents of the Book of the Acts are familiar to every reader of the Bible. The names of its personalities are imprinted on the minds of Christian people from their earliest years. Many of its dramatic passages are among the treasures of the Christian Church. Yet there are questions raised and issues to be determined which vitally affect the value of its evidence as a record and its interpretation of the faith it proclaims. These depend ultimately on the accuracy and adequacy of the writer's knowledge, the scope of his purpose, and the spiritual passion by which he was inspired. It is with these fundamental considerations that an Introduction must deal.

I

THE CHARACTER OF THE BOOK

This Book of the Acts is essentially the first volume of the history of the Christian Church. That status in literature has been denied, or at least granted with hesitation, on many grounds. It is true that, in a strict sense, the Christian Church had not been decisively organized in the period its narrative covers. But institutions have a history before they emerge in their full evolution and embodiment. It has also been disallowed on the ground of the brevity and incompleteness of many of its chronicles. The swift passage from incident to incident, without the historian's commentary, the habit of leaving behind many important events, without further mention, and without an estimate of their significances, and the seeming concentration on a few personalities, to the neglect of a wider and more inclusive survey of the action on the broad stage of events, oppose the claim to the rank of a history. Under the consciousness of these facts the early Christian writers named it simply, The Acts, or The Acts of the Apostles. For similar reasons its author was regarded merely as an annalist, inscribing from his diary in a simple way the origins of the Christian community. But a better conception of what history is leads the reader to recognize the class to which the book belongs. History may take one of two forms. It may be the patient, fully documented, and carefully collated account and criticism of the events in a life of a nation, or the record of an epoch, with carefully drawn portraits of its dominating personages, and an account of their action and reaction upon each other. Or it may be the record of the birth and development of an idea, or a movement, or a mode of thought, as it wrought itself out in the happenings of a period of time. Such a record will pass by much which arouses curiosity and stimulates interest. It will not make any attempt to present analytic portraits of the chief actors whose names recur. It will leave on one side, or make no more than a passing reference to, the personalities whom the movement leaves behind in its course. It will conduct the reader along the broad highway to the end which has been kept in view from the beginning, and has been the motive most potent with the writer.

To this class of history the Book of the Acts belongs. That is declared in its opening sentences. The author begins with the statement that his former treatise was concerned with what ' Jesus began both to do and teach.' The Gospel of Luke remains the most orderly and the most complete biography of Jesus. Now he sets out to describe the progress of the movement which came into being on the day on which Jesus bade His disciples farewell, and vanished out of their sight. When he has set down that tremendous fact he begins at once to record the working of the forces brought to bear on the minds of those to whom Jesus has given His great commission. He sets his purpose of following on the trail of those who were sent forth to be ' witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.' A

recollection of the course of the events which are recorded will show how clearly this is the object he had in view and the end he attained. To set the matter in broad terms, this author shows us how the Spirit of Jesus, working in and upon the first believers, fashioned the Church, so that it proclaimed and interpreted the life and the death and the resurrection of its Lord, widened the scope of His message, and enlarged not only the borders, but the moral and spiritual horizon of the Christian community and its faith, so that the Master's commission was carried out until His name was heard, and His praise was sung in the world capital of the time—the imperial city of Rome. 'I must see Rome' is the impassioned cry which this author heard on the lips of that witness who had first discerned the goal to which Jesus had bidden His disciples to travel, and the broad path which led to it. That sentence is the key-word to this historian's purpose. The book is, therefore, the history of the progressive march onward to the world-wide dominion of the Church of Jesus Christ.

II

Its Authorship

The first question which emerges is that of its authorship. The name of the writer is never mentioned, but there is little doubt of the truth of its ascription to Luke. Every other conjecture has been made almost impossible even by the arguments adduced in its support. Not only the almost universal witness of the early Christian writers, and the references in Paul's Epistles, but the unwitting testimony of his own personal allusions, give conclusive evidence. Luke was a native of Philippi, a Greek by race, and, in all likelihood, a freedman, with the legal and social standing of a Roman citizen. He was a physician, and, therefore, an educated man, with a trained mind accustomed to examine evidence, to estimate values, and to diagnose causes and effects. He had not, it would appear, the gift of impressive speech. He is not mentioned along with Silas, or Timothy, or Titus, as a preacher. But, as so often happens in the case of men who are not facile in speech, he was a master of the written word. His Gospel reveals on every page this power of fit and moving expression. In the Book of the Acts, as the masters of Greek literature point out, there are passages where Luke's graphic and felicitous style stands out in contrast to the ruder sentences of his quotations, and to the reports of the abrupt and rugged speeches which he engrosses. Beyond this mastery as a writer we can gather from the New Testament the character of the man himself. He is disclosed, by the tone and temper of his record, to be a man of native modesty, unaffected simplicity, and endearing unselfishness. A man of more strenuous type and more self-assertion would have been found presented in more emphatic ways. But even Paul makes only three references to Luke. In the Epistle to Philemon Paul closes with the words 'Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers.' And, as must be noticed, Luke's name is last on the list. In the Epistle to the Colossians he is more tenderly named as 'Luke, the beloved physician.' While, in the Second Epistle to Timothy, Paul pays him his great tribute—'Only Luke is with me'—as he records how many had left him in his Roman prison.

The most formative event of Luke's life was his meeting with Paul. That was of the first importance, not only for his character and for the course of his life, but for the sources of his knowledge. That meeting occurred at Troas, the Asiatic seaport which played so large a part in Paul's life. On that occasion Luke entered into the fellowship of the Christian faith, joined the little company of the believers, and became the devoted friend and companion of the man whose message had laid its spell on his mind and heart. We need not marvel that Paul, with Luke by his side, had his midnight vision of the man of Macedonia. Nor can we fail to understand that almost instant passage across the narrow strait to Europe and to Philippi. That first journey into the Western world gives us the clue to the chief sources of Luke's knowledge of the historic details which he engrossed in his Gospel and his history. Before meeting Paul, Luke knew nothing about Jesus. In all likelihood he had not even heard His name. The details which he records in his Gospel came, as he declares, from those who 'from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word.' In the same way, and after the same fashion, the incidents of the earlier chapters of the Book of the Acts became

known to him either from those who were actors on the stage or from their intimates. Luke's acquaintance with Barnabas, and afterwards with Mark, would make it easy for this man, with a genius for inquiring into origins and their meaning, to make himself aware of the events of the earlier years of the Christian story. Not only the facts themselves of the first five or six chapters of the Book, but the manner of their record, proclaim them to be Luke's report from those who shared in the sufferings that are recorded of the triumphant faith of those who endured them.

But the chief source for the larger part of Luke's history, and even for much of his record of the earlier events, was Paul. As he journeyed with him and they spoke together by the way, as he sat with him in the evening time, as he heard Paul preach, and as he listened to his many apologies for Christ, and to his own defence against his opponents, the early chapters of the history of the Church and the broad facts of the highway along which Luke's later chronicle travels became vivid and co-ordinated facts. For the story of Stephen's wisdom and spirit in the discussions in the synagogue in Jerusalem, for the report of his eloquent speech to the Sanhedrin, for the graphic picture of Stephen's dying hour, Paul is the clear authority. Even for the record of Peter's later years, and the account of the difference of ideal and of doctrine between the Jewish Christians and those of the Dispersion, Paul can be considered Luke's thoroughly competent informant. Paul's references in his Epistles to the personalities and the events and, still more, to the bases and the meaning of the Christian experience, allow us to understand the sources of Luke's knowledge of the personalities, and his clear recognition of the issues involved, in the onward progress of the Christian community, both in numbers and in a deeper insight into the mind of Christ.

But beyond these two sources, both so fully equipping for Luke's function, there is a third, which is of more value. Of some of the events recorded in the Book of the Acts Luke was himself an eye-witness, and an actor on the stage. In Acts xvi. 10 there is the first of those records which are called 'the *we* passages.' In these passages Luke, with his native modesty, records his own share in the events of the history, through his companionship with Paul. He writes that after Paul had seen the vision of the man of Macedonia, 'immediately *we* endeavoured to go into Macedonia,' implying that he, as Paul's companion, was recording events in which he played a part. When Paul left Philippi to pass on to Thessalonica, Luke discloses, by his omission of this personal pronoun 'we,' that he himself remained behind in Philippi. But, when Paul returned to Philippi, Luke became his companion and fellow-traveller. He accompanied him to Miletus, then to Tyre, then to Cæsarea, and at last to Jerusalem. The fully detailed record of the events, the long reports of the speeches, and, still more cogently, the vivid portraiture of the personages with whom Paul had to do, all give proof that Luke was Paul's constant companion in the last phase of his life, and a faithful reporter of what he saw and heard. When Paul's appeal to Cæsar compelled his judges to send him to Rome Luke became his loyal and endeared intimate. The adventures of the voyage are described by one to whom they remain the unforgettable incidents of the most perilous adventure of his life. The brief report of Paul's cordial welcome in Rome by the little Christian community, and the detailed account of his interview with 'the chief of the Jews,' present the final proof both of Luke's personal knowledge and of his controlling purpose. On the one hand there is the conclusive declaration that the Christian faith has found disciples in Rome; and on the other hand there is the almost triumphant note of the declaration that the gospel has a world-embracing universality. 'Be it known, therefore, unto you that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.' We understand how this man of trained mind, and of easy narrative style, used these three sources of evidence so as to produce this animated and large-visioned history.

III

Its Date

While there cannot be much doubt about the sources of Luke's knowledge, the question as to the date of the writing of the Book cannot be definitely answered. It could not have been written before the year A.D. 64, for it records events up to that date. Some have yielded

to the temptation to consider that Luke's closing sentence gives evidence that Paul was yet alive. It has been urged that all Luke's references to Rome imply that he is looking out upon the city, moving about its streets, and passing in and out of Paul's hired lodging. It has been declared that, because there is no reference to Paul's martyrdom in any sentence of the Book of the Acts, this history must have been written before Paul's death. For this friend and lover would not have avoided some reference to an event so shadowed by personal loss and sorrow. But these considerations wither when it is remembered that, in his Gospel, Luke's allusion to the prophecy of the doom of Jerusalem reveals the fact that the city had fallen before its besiegers. For while, both in the Gospels of Matthew and of Mark, there is only the vague allusion to 'the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel, the prophet, standing in the holy place' in Luke's Gospel we read 'when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.' That distinctive record may be taken as a proof of the fact that the closing chapter of the Book of the Acts could not have been written until after the year A.D. 70.

Another suggestion has been made, that the seemingly abrupt close of the Book indicates that the writer intended to carry the record farther on, or that some later portion of the manuscript is amissing. But, read with discrimination, this closing sentence is most natural and is quite after Luke's manner. He has traced the progress of the gospel to Rome. His purpose is fulfilled and his task is completed. He writes, therefore, 'And so we arrived at Rome . . . and Paul preached (there) the kingdom of God, and taught concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, with all boldness, none forbidding him.' This quiet statement, with its sense of repose, makes a fitting close to the story whose onward march Luke has traced. The conclusion that this was intended by Luke as his climax, at least for a time, is rendered more likely because of the naturally accented fall of the closing words in the Greek version. It is most likely on the whole that, as the present manuscript must be a fuller and more ordered rescript of the notes which Luke must have taken during the course of his intimacy with Paul, this closing verse represents the fulfilment of Luke's present purpose. It may well be that Luke intended to record the closing scenes in Paul's life history. Yet, as he also would leave Rome when the persecution under Nero spared none who had been associated with the Christian faith, such a document remained unwritten. The conclusion which seems most tenable is that this history was written a few years after the fall of Jerusalem and, as some are agreed, that it must have been completed before A.D. 80. It remains the considered and articulate chronicle of the events in the history of the Church for over thirty years, written by one who had the gift and the purpose of thoroughly authenticating the story he tells. It is the sole and incomparable witness of the rise and progress of the Christian faith, with a patient delineation of the forces which were the dynamic of its confessors and evangelists.

IV

St Luke's World

The interest aroused and held by this graphic narrative, and the swift succession of its events, is apt to keep a reader's mind focussed on the historic incidents, and so to forget the world in whose midst Luke lived. We realize too seldom how broad was his survey of that Western civilization gathered around the Mediterranean Sea, how accurate and secure was his knowledge of its diverse peoples and their modes of life, and how detailed is his presentation of the features of the Roman Empire. His references to the personages of the times, his precise naming of their titles and offices, his clear distinctions as to their jurisdiction and authority, are most evident to those who are best acquainted with the history of the first century. Whether he is relating the conduct of a Jewish High Priest, or the counsel of a Hebrew Rabbi, or indicating the law-abiding instinct of a Roman centurion, or the less scrupulous methods of a Greek official, or the autocratic actions of an imperial governor, Luke's references are always, simply and naturally, in accord with the facts. Every student of the New Testament who compares the story told in the Book of the Acts with the relevant allusions in the Epistles of Paul will be convinced of the many exact correspondences

and the undesigned coincidences. It is a simple truth to say that many of the allusions in Paul's Epistles, and some of the vital truths he proclaims, and the controversies in which he took part, would not be intelligible had we not this historical record in our hands. But Luke's entire veracity will stand a severer test. To set Luke's account of the conduct of the officers of law and justice with whom he came into touch alongside the statements of the classical scholars of the ancient world is to be assured that here is a man who knew the authorities of his time, the spheres of their action, and the motives by which they were swayed. But we need not be content with the attestations of the classical scholar and the secular historian. Luke abides a severer test. Such a master of New Testament literature as Harnack, such a trained and discerning traveller as Sir William Ramsay, and such a patient and large-minded archæologist as Deissmann is considered to be, unite to vindicate Luke's claim to a perfect understanding of the time, and a sedulous care in transcribing his record of its events.

The fullness of his knowledge is equally remarkable. Anyone who will make up a list of the governing personages who appear in his pages, either Jews or Gentiles, will be amazed at the length of the roll of their names, the definite description of their spheres and functions, the insight into their controlling ambitions, and the estimate of their hopes and fears. As notable is the fair and dispassionate account given of communities and of customs and even of faiths to which Luke was natively alien. To accompany him to the uplands of Lycaonia, with its unthinking and crude-minded peasant folk, or to travel northwards to the more enlightened and cultured city of Antioch, or to see with his eyes the surging mob in the streets of Ephesus, with their cry 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians,' or, again, to be a witness of the critical listeners at Athens as they turned aside with a contemptuous remark after listening to Paul's unforgettable apology, is to realize how nobly Luke could rule his own spirit. As we pass with Luke from city to city, and from port to port, and from land to land, the whole ancient world rises before our eyes.

Equally arresting are the indications, often in a passing phrase, of his knowledge of the social order and the communal life of the Roman Empire. The trade and commerce, the industries of the people, the modes of travel, the methods of dealing with prisoners, and the rights of Roman citizens are all set upon his page. As notable is the scrupulously fair and unbiassed description of the superstitious cults and the fanatic temper of the Pagan religions which held their devotees in the thrall of a degrading worship. But what is dominant in every reference to this environment is Luke's sympathy with its darkness, its degradation, its moral and spiritual bondage. As we read his chapters we see not only the rich and the poor, the enslaved and the free, the artisan and the official, but the persecutor and the persecuted, the blasphemer with his curse and the believer with his song. And always, in contrast to these, we are led into the presence of the little companies of Christian folk, sometimes gathered in a hospitable home, sometimes meeting by a river-side, sometimes assembled in an upper room where they listen to the gospel of the Kingdom, and break bread in remembrance of their Lord. Not only the members of the Christian Church, but those outside its pale, too seldom realize how much of our common knowledge of the ancient heathen world is due to this patient, discerning, thoroughly informed and most trustworthy historian. There is no history so widely read, and none of such deep and abiding influence, as that of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles.

V

An Analysis of the Book

When we come to an analysis of the contents of this history we enter upon an inquiry of exceeding interest, but not so compassed about with difficulty. In the case of a writing so directed and dominated by a controlling purpose we may expect to find in it a fairly clear, or at least recognizable, order. Every history is compelled to observe a certain chronological succession. But Luke is not writing with a calendar before him. The engrossing of distinct times in the course of the story, the mention of certain years during which events took place, and the clear insistence on certain days and their happenings, are always careful and significant. Some of Luke's reports resemble those printed in a daily newspaper, owing to the

exactitude of such details. But he does not often mark the historic progress of the events by the passing of the seasons. Few readers would guess that the incidents recorded in the first six chapters occupy fully as many years. They tempt us to think that a month or two might have been sufficient for them all. No one realizes, as he reads through the Book of the Acts, that we have compressed into these few event-thronged pages the story of a third of a century. If we attempt a division of the Book into distinctive sections, it cannot be one determined by dates. It can only be that of a clearly marked progress in the development of the movement, as that is dependent on decisive changes in the scope of its mission and in the incidents of its advance. For this purpose the division into chapters which obtains in our authorized English Version is of little use and of slight avail. Occasionally it is misleading, and obscures at times some of the easily discernible summit levels which Luke marks quite clearly.

As a consequence there have been many suggested divisions of the Book into sections which seem to indicate the bold outline in the writer's mind. The least defensible of these is that which would gather these twenty-eight chapters into two books, and name one of them the progress of the gospel with Peter as its central figure, and the other that same progress with Paul as the outstanding personality. But the simplest reader can see that these two personalities appear on the stage at one time, and that Paul becomes a strenuous actor, first as the bitterest enemy of the Christian Church, and again as its most aggressive preacher, while Peter is still recognized as its leading apostle. Another suggested division is of greater value, and has been approved by some competent expositors. It accepts a threefold division. The first comprises the progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to Antioch as detailed in the first twelve chapters. The second includes Paul's missionary journeys as found in the next seven chapters. The third records Paul's voyage to Rome, with a note on his residence in the city, in the closing chapters of the book. But this scheme of division is not supported by a watchful reading of the text, and is at variance with the outline suggested by Luke himself in the Introduction. There Luke anticipates a fourfold division when he sets down the area and extent of the historic development as beginning in Jerusalem, passing on to Judæa, and then to Samaria and, finally, to the uttermost part of the earth.

But, as might be expected, the most careful writer will often find himself unable to keep rigidly to the outline which was in his mind when he began his task. A reader will find that Luke reaches certain landing places at which he pauses, and that he marks his pause by a significant comment, which is really the declaration of the completion of a stage of the history. It is after each of these pauses that he begins to record a new series of events which indicate both the wider area of the gospel ministry, the larger inclusion within its ranks of confessors, and above all the broader interpretation of its Divine message. When we keep these things in mind we may find it defensible at least to postulate that the historic materials have been arranged under six recognizable divisions, and that these can be entitled in accordance with the ruling purpose of the writer. The scheme may be presented in this way.

First—I. 1-14. The Divine Commission to the witnesses of the Church.
Second—I. 15–VI. 7. The witness of the apostles in Jerusalem.
Third—VI. 8–XII. 25. The witness of the evangelists of the Church in the borders of the land.
Fourth—XIII. 1–XIX. 20. The witness of the missionaries of the Church in the regions beyond.
Fifth—XIX. 21–XXVI. 22. The witness of the foremost apostle of the Church to Judaism, in Jerusalem.
Sixth—XXVII. 1–XXVIII. 31. The witness of the apostle in Rome.

A brief review will set the salient features of these six divisions in a confirming light. The Introduction (I. 1-14) might have been appended to the Gospel. The last four verses of Luke's Gospel are simply a previous epitome of this fuller and more uplifting account of the close of our Lord's forty days after His resurrection. Luke's purpose is not to re-affirm the ascension of Jesus, but to set down His command to be witnesses to Him, and to record His promise of power through the coming of

the Holy Ghost. It closes fittingly with a picture of the Church, gathered together in the Upper Room (including, most significantly, the women), waiting in prayer for the season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

The second division (I. 15–VI. 7) opens with the election by the Church of a twelfth apostle in the room of Judas. The quiet time of waiting which follows is broken in upon by the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, when the promised power is bestowed. At once, in a new-born and amazing eloquence, in miraculous healings, in a dauntless bearing before the Sanhedrin, as well as in the daily fellowship of prayer, and of the breaking together of the memorial bread, the witness to Christ is given, and the Church grew, in spite of persecution, into its outward form and inward strength. It closes with one of Luke's pause-notes—'And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly' (VI. 7).

The third division opens with an account of the ministry of Stephen, and a rescript of his apology, continuing with the record of his martyrdom, which closes with a brief and significant note regarding 'a young man whose name was Saul,' whose conversion is given in due detail. But the persecuting frenzy of the Jews broke out in merciless despite upon the witnesses. They were scattered abroad, and went everywhere into the districts of the land around the city, preaching the word. In Samaria, at Lydda and Joppa, as far away as Damascus and Cæsarea, the Roman capital of the land, the message was carried with power. There are evidences set down of the coming struggle between the Jewish and Gentile adherents to the faith. There is a note of a controversy regarding the scope of the gospel, due to such conversions as that of Cornelius. The immediate result is indicated in the statement that the gospel was preached 'to none but unto the Jews only' (XI. 19). The Herodian persecution casts its shadow upon the page, but Herod's sudden death is recorded as an evidence of the judgment of God. Luke again sets down his pause-note—'But the word of God grew and multiplied' (XII. 24).

The fourth division opens with the account of the broad-minded, far-visioned missionary zeal of the Church in Antioch. Here Paul emerges as the dynamic leader of the Christian community. But the outpouring of blessing upon the Gentiles raised the question of the necessity of circumcision for admission to the membership of the believers. That Jewish rite was definitely abolished at the Council held at Jerusalem, after indubitable evidence that the Spirit of God had been bestowed on the Gentiles, and that the Hebrew ritual had no place in the new dispensation. From that Council the witnesses went forth into Asia Minor, visiting its then prosperous cities, and passing on, across the sundering sea, to Philippi, and to Thessalonica, and to Athens, and to Corinth. The record is of absorbing interest, as it engrosses the names and the experiences of men and women who were delivered from their evil passions, the bondage of their superstitious rites, the shame of their unholy lives, the curse of their corrupting books, and were baptized into the membership of the Church. Here again Luke sets down his pause-note—'So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed' (XIX. 20).

The fifth section (XIX. 21–XXVI. 32) carries us back, through the cities of Paul's evangelistic tour, to Troas and Ephesus, and then on to Jerusalem. The writer reveals his knowledge of the passion of Paul's heart for the redemption of Israel, and his haunting purpose of proclaiming the gospel in the city he could never forget. But he had not reckoned with the vindictive hatred of its priestly rulers. Neither a gracious acquiescence to custom in the taking of a vow, nor an appealing defence spoken from the stairs of the Temple, availed him. In the uproar which followed the Roman captain was compelled to interfere, and to rescue Paul from the incensed and murderous mob. His appearance before the priestly council, and their open hostility compelled him to appeal to be tried by a Roman tribunal, as was the right of a Roman citizen. That led to his three successive examinations—before Felix, and Festus, and finally before Agrippa. The issue of his appeal, and their unwillingness to release Paul, led to his being sent to Rome. Luke's record of Agrippa's aside to Festus is the pause-note which concludes this section—'This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar' (XXVI. 32).

The sixth division (XXVII. 1–XXVIII. 31) is occupied with an account of the tedious and perilous voyage to Rome, so detailed that it

might have been taken from a sailor's log-book. It recites Paul's inevitable leadership, the impression he made upon his fellow-travellers, his reception by the believers in Rome. And it closes with his eager appeal to the leading men of the Jewish community, with the result that 'some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.' As they left his presence he condensed the truth, which Luke had been setting in clear light, into a final statement so terse and decisive that it can be discerned to be the moving passion of Luke's heart. 'Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.' That is, broadly asserted, the message which Luke designed to give to that Theophilus who represents the Christian believer of the day.

VI

Its Message

Any attempt to review the dominant truths of this greatly condensed history is faced by the difficulty of a choice between competing features. It may be well to be content with setting down four of the religious certainties which held its author's mind, and which are disclosed not only in passing significant references but in express statement.

1. The first of these is *the certainty of the presence of the risen Lord.* It is surprising to find that Luke, who wrote his 'treatise' concerning the life of Jesus and knew the story of the days of Galilee and Judæa, as few others have known them, gives only a hint of the earthly ministry of Jesus, and does not cite any incident of His grace, or quote any sentence from His lips. Even the name 'Jesus' is strangely infrequent. The name which had become dear, and was heard on the lips of the early converts, was 'Christ.' 'The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.' They were so named by the quick-witted hearers because there was preached to them, not Jesus of Nazareth, but the Christ who died and rose again from the dead, and still visited His people. That Jesus who went about doing good, as Luke recalls, was now the risen Lord, still appearing in the midst of His people, still standing beside them in their hours of fear, still hearing their thanksgivings and their prayers, still visible in the hour of their dying. There are modern lives of Jesus which carry us no further than the Cross, and speak of Him as the carpenter, the compassionate healer, and the man with the genius both for speech and for rule over men. Luke is held by a more sublime and a more uplifting truth. Jesus is the Christ, because He is the Lord who rose again from the dead, and still walks in the streets of great cities, and still makes His presence known in the great hours of their experience. So intense is Luke's preoccupation with this truth that the name 'Lord,' which strews his pages, is no longer the appellation of the Most High God. It is the endeared name of that Christ who is the Lord over His Church, who shall be crowned at last as Lord over all. His presence is the place not only of peace and of joy but of power.

2. The second truth is *the enduement with power by the Holy Ghost.* That enduement is bestowed in the descent of the Spirit of God in fulfilment of the promise recorded in John's Gospel, 'He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.' That is emphasized, not only in the transcendent opening event of the history, but on every page. Some have been inclined to name this Book, 'The Gospel of the Holy Ghost.' But that is a needless excess. Yet from beginning to end the inflow of power in apprehension, in word, and in deed, is through the gift of the Spirit. As men and women are moved by the Spirit, as they are filled with the Spirit, as the Spirit falls upon them, they prophesy, they speak with convicting power, they face their foes with courage, they pass into the inner sanctuary of the faith, and they lay hold on the great certainties of the gospel. Not to have received this baptism of the Holy Spirit, as was the case of the believers in Corinth, was to have failed to enter into the enlightening and energizing power of the gospel. To have received only John's baptism was to abide in the outer court of the revelation of God. The many miracles which were wrought, the brave deeds which were done, the cruel persecutions which were endured, the uplift in faith which broke out in song, the secure entrance into the knowledge of the mind and will of Christ, and the assurance of His presence, were all attained through the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

3. The third truth is set in the repeated declaration that *the gospel of Christ is the power*

of God unto salvation. That Christ lived and died, and rose again from the dead, to save men from the sin and shame, the degradation and misery, the base ideals and the corrupting customs of the world—that is Luke's assured conviction. As we have attempted to realize that heathen world into which the gospel came, with its festering sores both of body and of soul, we ought also to realize that new realm into which Luke believed men and women were called to live when they had shared in this Gospel of salvation. That world of undisguised iniquity whose curse no faith had lifted, whose degradation no religion had abolished, whose corruption no spiritual power had healed, was renewed in hope and baptized into love by this salvation. Philosopher and moralist, Stoic and Epicurean, the mystic cults of the East, and the dark Pagan religions of the West, had all attempted to redeem humanity from its enslavement. By an exacting ethic, by a rigorous code of law, by the counsels of grave teachers, and by the urgent appeal of prophets, men had been called to a new obedience. But all had failed. Then, as Luke affirms, Christ had come, Christ had spoken, Christ had done what no other man had done, Christ had lived, and died, and risen again, and as the pure beauty of His life, and the illuminating power of His word, and the unapproachable victory of His cross were proclaimed, a new sense of sin was given, and a new craving for pardon was created, and men entered into salvation. Luke records not only the purity and the peace and the passion for souls, but also the joy in God of this salvation whose historic triumph he sets on record.

4. The fourth truth is *the universality of this gospel of the redeeming love of Christ.* The peril which threatened the very existence of the Early Church was that of limiting, not only the area of the power of the gospel, but the breadth of its central message. Luke discloses the just fear of the larger-minded believers, that the Christian gospel might become not a Divine message for humanity, but only for a race—not the good news of God's love for all mankind, but only for a privileged sect. No base slogan of unscrupulous men ever stirred any human heart to a pulsing fear so constant as Luke's heart was moved by the cry, 'Except ye be circumcised, ye cannot be saved.' No proclamation made his face to shine with light as did the declaration, 'Then hath God granted unto the Gentiles salvation unto life.' There was a day when brave hearts feared that the gospel would be preached to Jews only. That danger became imminent by the fact that its first messengers walked along the Jewish road. The Hebrew race, then as now, were notable emigrants. They were to be found in every large city. They were loyal to their own faith with a jealous exclusiveness. They observed their own laws under legal reservation. But, with a distinctive tenacity, they maintained the worship of the Synagogue. The early Christian evangelists were Hebrews by birth, and they found entrance to these Synagogues. Their temptation was to adapt their message to the Jewish mind, and to accept the gospel as merely a more liberal rendering of the prophetic truths of the Hebrew scripture. They were assailed by the temptation to transform the gospel of Christ into a liberal Judaism, as they are tempted to do to this day. It was not until Stephen, Paul's master in the faith, and then Paul, with his vision of the risen Lord, preached a gospel which abolished the Temple, with its priest and altar and sacrifice, and proclaimed the offering, once for all, of the blood of Jesus Christ, that men saw how decisive was the denial of the need of the ceremonial laws of Moses, and the fleshly rites of the Jewish faith. Luke was a Gentile. He was not tempted as were Peter and James and John to this narrowing of the door. Paul was born in a Gentile city, and brought up in a Gentile community. Within his large and forthright mind the battle was fought. He became the protagonist of the gospel of God's love in Christ for the world, and Luke became the historian of its battle and its victory. If there be one truth that quickened Luke's imagination, and roused his mind to a persistent energy, it was this universality of the gospel of salvation, through the love and sacrifice of Christ.

W. M. Clow.

A First Chapter in the Life of Christ

Acts i. 1.—'The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.'

This is Luke's account of his own marvellous Gospel. He dismisses it as a mere introduction,

a brief preface, arresting, and very wonderful, and yet impressive mainly because of its sure prophecy of even bigger and more central things to come. 'The former treatise have I written unto you of all that Jesus did and taught—as a beginning.' That surely is the very finest tribute ever paid to Christ. The rest of us with any eyes to see are held spell-bound by the immensity of our Lord's gifts. And little wonder! For who can estimate the colossal difference He has made. With all its knowledge, had the world not possessed these four slim pamphlets—they are nothing more—which we call the Gospels, how bare and pinched and niggardly life would have been. Is it not here that we have learned to know what God is really like? We cannot think of God except in terms of Christ.

Is it not here, too, that we have found what our own life might be; that we have come upon new and honouring standards for ourselves before which our poor character and conduct, which we had thought quite creditable, shrink into shamed unworthiness? As Alcibiades put it to Socrates in the Symposium: 'Somehow the words of other people don't affect me much: but yours, even stray fragments passed on inaccurately at second hand, grip the soul of every one who hears them, and make me ashamed of what I am, so that I know I couldn't live beside you and still be it.' And is not that far truer about Jesus Christ, who has become to innumerable souls a kind of conscience that will not silence? When they do wrong, it is Christ's hurt eyes that they see; it is the pain in them that makes them miserable.

And is it not in these same Gospels that multitudes have come upon that strange new spiritual power which has lifted them up above themselves, made possible what they could never do in spite of all their willing? It is pathetic to note how many—Wordsworth and Coleridge for two—have fastened on these old lines as a favourite quotation, aptly summing up the longings of their hearts:

> Unless above himself he can
> Erect himself, how poor a thing is man.

And it is Christ who has endowed him with the power to do it.

Luke, too, knows all that, better, perhaps, than almost any other. And yet to him Christ is so big that he feels clear that even Calvary cannot exhaust Him; that, whatever we have received from Him, it is but the overflow spilt from full hands that are as full as ever, and held out for us to take it all; that always beyond the best that Christ has given us there is a better still, if we be willing to appropriate it. So he writes his Gospel, and gives it as a heading the audacious title, 'A first chapter in the life of Christ!' 'The former treatise have I written of all that Jesus did and taught—as a beginning!'

1. It was only *a beginning of Christ's work for us.* Everywhere in the Testament the writers assume that His life is being devoted to us and our interests as lavishly and as whole-heartedly as was that which He spent on earth. Christ has not passed on and forgotten us, as we, moving from a town, scarcely remember the acquaintances with whom we used to mingle daily many years ago. Other friends and interests have blurred them from our forgetful minds. But it is not so with Christ. He has not finished His work of salvation, and put both it and us out of His mind, and turned to other things. Even in heaven, they say, He is constantly thinking of us, planning for us, praying on our behalf. They employ many metaphors; but take one—tremendous to their Jewish minds. It was the supreme moment of the year, when the awed people, with a great intake of the breath, watched the High Priest as he approached the veil, and, laying his hand on it, drew it aside, and he was in the presence of God pleading their case face to face. How easy it had suddenly grown to believe, how near God has drawn! But it soon passed; the priest came forth, and they rose up and went back to their ordinary life, and somehow they seemed to leave God behind them. But for the Christians there was no such feeling; for their whole lives were lived in the happy vivid faith of that high moment. We have a High Priest, they said, always within the veil, always pleading for us, and God is always listening to His prayers on our behalf, and Christ's whole life is being spent for us. It was not only three years that He gave us, no, nor three and thirty; but to all eternity He lives for us, works for us, loves us, offers continually a prevailing intercession for us.

¶ 'If,' said M'Cheyne, 'I could hear Jesus pleading for me in the next room, I should not fear a host of enemies; but distance makes no difference; He is pleading for me.'

For every soul in every need
He ever lives to intercede,
Presenting there within the veil
The Sacrifice that cannot fail.

Our heavenly great High Priest He stands:
By piercèd Feet, and piercèd Hands,
By thorn-scarr'd Brow and riven Side,
He pleads for those for whom He died![1]

2. It is but *the beginning of our personal religion.* That is an immensely unpopular phrase these days. Plotinus blushed that he had a body; and many earnest-minded people of our generation seem to blush because they have a soul; to be really ashamed of any trouble and time and struggle they give to its culture and education, as a mere selfishness. Bosola, in *The Duchess of Malfi*, complains of a new fashion in the carving of tombs. 'No longer,' he says, 'do princes' images lie as they were wont, seeming to pray up to heaven, but with their hands under their cheeks, as if they died of the toothache: with their eyes no longer fixed on the stars, but bent upon the world.' And to-day religious life seems to have lost not a little in devoutness, and seeks to substitute a rustle of energy. No doubt there may be this in what seem disquieting facts—that people are learning that the churches are not, so to speak, factories where religion is woven, but rather power-houses, and that the real work is done elsewhere. But sometimes it looks as if they thought that no power is required at all. 'It is not what I have or what I do, it is what I am, that is my kingdom,' says Carlyle. The Church to-day must take it in that untiring organization cannot take the place of the Holy Spirit, and that much fussy, restless activity is not really as efficient as the rushing and mysterious winds of God.

¶ 'My spirit is fain for the coolness,' cry the Buddhist saints. Well, ours are not; like to feel hot, and to rush here and there. All that is best in us goes out in bustling service of our fellows, rather than in tense, expectant waiting upon God. As Whyte said grimly, 'Gabriel is said to have come swiftly to Daniel while he was speaking and praying. He would need to come very swiftly indeed to most of us if he is to catch us on our knees!'[1]

If we want to be serviceable to Christ and our fellows, it must be, mainly, through our own personality. Tertullian tells us he and most of the converts of his day were won, not by reading the Scriptures, but by watching how the Christians lived and died, until a wistfulness sprang up in them to gain this something so impressive that these others obviously had. So it is that the faith has always spread. And to-day those outside the Church tell us quite candidly that they are there largely because they see no difference at all between us with Christ and themselves without Him. Cross us, they allege, and we are just as irritable as they are; watch us in business, and we are every whit as worldly and as earthy in the make-up of our minds. We must get back to personal religion, if we are to be really useful to the cause. Look at the Gospel hopes, the New Testament promises, what are they? If you will let me, says the Master, I can make you—not merely a somewhat expurgated edition of yourself, but 'perfect': I will change you into My own likeness, so that naturally and spontaneously you will do what I would do were I there in your place. All this, of course, we know and believe in a way, yet have no expectation of it actually happening to us. And so, the full years come and go without any conspicuous spiritual gains to mark them, and we are not taken aback because the plain definite promises seem to achieve little or no fulfilment in our case. As Seneca put it in one of his letters, 'I am still toiling with all my might at my old task of seeking to eradicate my old faults.' Christ or no Christ, we too have old, old faults, and they do not seem to leave us. Yet Christ came, not only to hearten and thrill and inspire, but, did we let Him, to save us from our sins. It is only a beginning that we have received from Him as yet. The gift He offers is not merely His affection, wonderful although that is; not only His forgiveness, though that sounds impossible, but His own character.

3. It is but *the beginning of what Christ has to teach us.* Every age sees some truth that

[1] S. J. Stone, *Poems and Hymns*, 277.

[1] A. J. Gossip, *The Galilean Accent*, 14.

has lain more or less in shadow to previous eyes. And we must learn the lesson God is teaching men in our own time. There is no doubt that the rising generation lays the emphasis on brotherhood and the service of our fellow-men. And probably there is in that a danger that we all may be swept by the current into speaking as if better hours and cleaner houses and more wages—mere social reform—can in themselves satisfy and fill the huge immortal hungry heart of man. And yet surely it is well that the new generation puts the stress upon a central thing and is not losing itself in mere bypaths, that it is absolutely sure that, if a man love God, then he must love his fellows also, and gives no weight to a religion which fails there. It looks round upon this world so full of evils and soreness and rank injustices and then at us, and asks with a directness that is disconcerting, If you allow these to remain, how dwelleth the love of God in you? To some theirs may seem a shallow type of mind. And yet Paul felt that faith was good, that hope perhaps was even better, but that far the best of all was love. And if they are emphasizing that, are they not on sound lines? Did not the Master Himself tell us that at the last we shall not be asked much, not anything perhaps, about our souls except just this, 'Did you so train yours that you could not bear the sufferings of others in the world, that you had to rise up and spend yourself to put things right, so far as in you lay?' Surely it is the simplest fact that we are, as yet, only at the beginning of the Master's teaching here. 'I believe,' says Sir Henry Jones, 'that our spiritual knowledge and practice, both individual and social, is so crude and rudimentary that we cannot even imagine the splendour of the results which an inquiring religious faith can bring to man.'

We all feel amicably towards mankind, but what comes of it other than some broken fragments of charity which we toss to the unfortunates who ask not charity but justice? We need to be taught the lesson which the younger voices keep reiterating—that if Christ laid down His life for us, we in our turn should give ours for our brethren.

¶ Bishop Tucker bade fair to make a great reputation as an artist. He had exhibited in the Royal Academy. But one day, when he was painting the picture of a poor lost woman struggling in the street, with the sleet and the wind beating in her face and a little baby at her breast, with the doors and windows of the street in which she was struggling closed against her—when he was finishing this picture, suddenly the thought came to him, 'God bless my soul, how can I be so busy with the picture of a lost woman, instead of going out to preach the gospel to those who are really lost?' And from that moment he consecrated himself to bearing his bold and brave witness in the darkest parts of the earth to those who would hear him.[1]

We must remember that Luke's second life of Christ is called 'The Acts of the Apostles.' Stephen suffered, Paul preached, Peter toiled, but Luke felt it was Christ Himself who really worked through them. And to-day we are the disciples—Christ's body through which alone He can express Himself. If folk are to be reached, then it must be through us; if the world is to be won, it will not be by theologians or preachers, but by ordinary people, as they move about their common tasks, displaying something in their character that will make others look from them to Christ, seeking a solution. To us there comes that staggering promise that, if we believe, the works that He did we shall do also, and 'greater works than these.' Wherefore do not let us be prematurely satisfied with what is after all only a foretaste and a mere beginning.

The Manifestations of the Risen Lord

Acts i. 3.—'To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion . . . being seen of them forty days.'

Between the rising and the ascending there were probably eleven separate appearances of the risen Jesus. Two are narrated only by St Paul, the last witness but the first to record for us in writing the great fact. Each appearance is full of instruction and prophecy, rich with answer to the great question so many hearts are asking, 'What is He to us, what are we to Him?' Let us try to gather up some of the lessons by briefly looking at some of these recorded appearances. They fall, naturally, into two groups—those which took place on Easter Day, and those which took place in the course of the following forty days.

[1] G. H. S. Walpole.

1. *The Appearances on Easter Day.*—We have three recorded manifestations of the Lord Jesus, leading and outstanding, vouchsafed by Him on the day of His resurrection. They were certainly not the only ones which that day witnessed, but they are the only ones given to us in detail; and the details are such that each has a significance all its own, while all combine in some messages of supreme import. To Mary in the garden of the sepulchre, to the two friends on the Emmaus road, to the company gathered at evening in the chamber—these are the three manifestations.

(1) 'Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week,'—thus we read in St Mark—'he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.' The fact is full of meaning. The first sight of the triumphant Saviour was granted to one who had most sorely needed His help. His first words were: 'Woman, why weepest thou?' To her who loved much, much was given. The tears which veiled the Comforter still brought Him to console.

At dusk of dawn the fragrant garden slept
Full of a mystery the night had known,
When Mary entered, trembling and alone,
And as she tread the grassy way she wept;
But from the place of deepest shadow crept
A light most radiant—there was no stone!
And the cold rock in which He rested shone
Where two archangels holy vigil kept.
Wondering she saw the flame-white seraphim
At the dark entrance bidding her rejoice,
Yet on the flowers her tears fell one by one;
Then turning comfortless in search of Him
She heard the quiet music of a Voice,
And Christ stood there against the rising sun.[1]

Sorrow, isolation, the memory of the Cross, these commonly first bring Christ to us in His glory. In His glory, and yet we know Him not. To us, absorbed in our own grief, preoccupied with our own dreams, He seems some common man. It is not till He calls us by name, till He makes us know what we are, that we can recognize Him. And then follows the reaction. As before Mary had seen but a 'gardener,' so, when one word revealed the Lord, she would have kept Him as she saw Him then. But at once the tidings of separation were coupled with the removal of bereavement: 'Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.' Purely personal and earthly devotion has no true place in the service of the risen Christ. Human tears, if indulged in, hide Him. We may not claim to retain Him for ever as He once showed Himself. He would lift us up above ourselves, and not restore only that which we cherish with imperfect affection. This is the first lesson of Christ's appearance.

(2) Then came the afternoon, and the Emmaus walk. Cleopas and his friend travel out to the country, and talk as they go—an uncommon thing with Orientals, who do not usually chat upon the road; only urgent matters break their silence then. Lo, 'a Stranger joins them, courteous as a friend.' Within a few minutes He is deep in their confidence; soon He has led them into a long, continuous, detailed Bible study. They follow His guidance from Genesis to the latest pages of their ancient Scriptures. Strangely moving the exposition proves; their hearts are burning; their whole being is awakening to the mysterious, blessed glory of a foretold Sufferer who was to save and to reign through death. Then the sun sinks, and the three friends sit down to the evening meal; their eyes are opened, and lo, it is the Lord.

¶ There is a well-known incident of Thackeray walking to the west of Edinburgh, and seeing the wooden crane of the quarry standing out, as if etched upon the sky, and so placed as to assume the figure of a cross. Thackeray and his three companions gazed at it silently. 'As they gazed, Thackeray gave utterance, in a tremulous, gentle, and rapid voice, to what all were feeling, in the word "Calvary." His friends walked on in silence, and then turned to other things. All that evening he was very gentle and serious, speaking, as he seldom did, of divine things—of death, of sin, of eternity, of salvation—expressing his simple faith in God and in his Saviour.'[1]

(3) Passing over two, or perhaps three, other appearances of the Lord, which are very briefly noticed, we come to the third critical appearance on the Easter Day. The tidings that 'the Lord was risen' had already spread, and the

[1] T. S. Jones.

[1] W. M. Clow, *The Cross in Christian Experience.*

disciples were gathered together, as it would seem, to meditate on the joyful news. 'When the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.' Here, then, was a new trial of faith. Before Christ had shown Himself, so to speak, naturally, but now the miracle of His presence was obvious. Fear or reason might well suggest to those present that 'they saw a spirit.' And so Christ met the double doubt. 'Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see. . . . And . . . he shewed them his hands and his feet . . . and did eat before them.'

It was the springtime when He rose;
Among the lilies white and sweet
He moved, to songs of happy birds,
With nail-pierced Feet.

He passed where fields of living green
Were growing to the Harvest day;
To reap the harvest of His pain
He went His way.

And hearts by death made desolate,
When He said 'peace,' leaped at the word;
And eyes despair had dulled, looked up
And saw the Lord.

Then faith and hope were born anew;
And weeping sorrow learned to sing;
And over every graveyard breathed
The breath of Spring.[1]

2. *The Appearances after Easter.*—For a whole week, it seems, the disciples were left to ponder on what they had seen and heard, without further manifestations of Christ. He was with them, doubtless, as He is with us, though they knew it not. Then after eight days as they were together 'when the doors were shut,' He again appeared among them.

(1) There was one of the eleven absent when the Lord first visited the little band, one who, when Jesus bent His steps towards Jerusalem for His last passion, had bravely said, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him' (John xi. 16). Thomas heard from his companions the story of the opened, vanquished grave; yet he refused to believe. He was clearly unreasonable; he had for this fact of resurrection the same evidence as that on which men act in every circumstance of life, the testimony of witnesses whom he had known and trusted long respecting facts which they themselves had quite recently directly seen and heard. The Scriptures he acknowledged, and the exposition at Emmaus must have been reported to him; yet is he obstinate: 'I will not believe.' Our experience of human nature would lead us to expect that his brethren would have little patience with such obduracy and suspicion. In cases such as that the very Church has not been slow to repel and excommunicate; it has been too often cruelly intolerant of less unreasonable doubt. But our Lord knows the human heart; He knows how imperious are the demands of reason, how hard is the voice of pride. True, Thomas was, as thousands since have been and are, in reason's name unreasonable; yet was he not refused, but met, more than *met*, for Christ went all the way to satisfy and clear his doubts. The pierced hands are spread before him; he is bidden not only see, but touch; the wounded side awaits the reaching forth of the proving hand. And, behold, the last convinced is the first confessor of the fullness of gospel truth. No word is added, nor can the faith of the Ages add a word, to the adoring cry of Thomas, 'My Lord and my God!'

¶ The subject of the St Mary's sermon was St Thomas, an old subject with me, but yet always new. There is nothing more pathetic. It *must* have really happened, and therefore the Resurrection of the Lord is a certain fact. Imagine some genius, fifty or a hundred years after, creating such a scene poet-like! No, the truth is not dramatically but literally true. Those words were once actually spoken and actually heard.[1]

(2) After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias. All was uncertain; they were waiting for definite instructions; but meanwhile they were not willing to idle away their time. 'I go a-fishing,' said Peter; 'we also go with thee,' said the others. They went at it with a will, throwing their whole heart into it, persevering through all the night though they caught nothing. Then Jesus appeared to them on

[1] W. W. Sidey.

[1] *Henry Montagu Butler*, 92.

the shore. It was the contemplative Apostle who first saw Him, and the impulsive Apostle who was the first to go to Him, and the result of the appearance was that their toil was crowned with success, and they enjoyed afterwards a time of privilege and refreshing with their Master on the shore.

¶ I am glad that Christ did not appear only in the garden, and the closed room, and lonely mountain top. I am glad that He appeared also to these fishermen when they were doing with all their might their ordinary everyday work. It says to each one of us :

See Him in the street ; serve Him in the shop ;
Sow with Him thy wheat ; house for Him thy crop ;
Sail with Him at sea ; work with Him on land,
Tell Him faithfully all that thou hast planned.[1]

(3) On the Mount in Galilee—the Mount, we may believe, which was already hallowed by many lessons of Divine love—Christ met the great body of His disciples, and, declaring the fullness of His power in heaven and earth, charged them to teach all nations. And as it was not on apostles only that He breathed the gift of the Holy Spirit, so neither was it to the apostles only that this charge was given. ' Ye have an unction from the Holy One.' ' Ye are a royal priesthood.' The charge is for us—for all of us according to our special place and duty ; and not the charge only, but the accompanying promise, which no age can exhaust, no faithlessness annul : ' Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'

Waiting

Acts i. 4.—' And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.'

In old time the week between Ascension Day and Whitsunday was known as Expectation Week—the week when the disciples waited in expectancy for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. We are told that those days of waiting were days of gladness and rejoicing, days of worship and prayer and praise. But surely they must also have been days tinged with anxiety, days of wonder when the great experience of which they had been warned would take place. Those men and women had passed through great experiences, moral and spiritual, during the year or two that was past. Entirely new views of life and religion had opened out to them. Sin and moral evil had acquired new aspects. They had learned that God was to them a Father—tender, loving, patient, forgiving, claiming and seeking the response of their devotion. They were coming to see that as they stood related to Him whom they had owned as Teacher and Friend, so they were related to God and to eternity. But they had had experiences of another kind also. Their hopes had often been disappointed. Once indeed on the dark day of Calvary their hopes had been utterly dashed to pieces. Then came the unspeakable thrill—the unimagined surprise—of the Easter Day. Surely that must be the climax, they would think. Could there be anything greater or richer or fuller in human experience than the moment when they saw the Risen Lord ? Then followed the wonderful experiences of the Forty Days, so blessed, so reassuring, when, all unexpected, Jesus would stand in their midst, breathing upon them His benediction of peace, teaching them that they lived on the frontier of two worlds, and that this firm, solid earth was interpenetrated by the spiritual. And so experience upon experience was theirs, and yet there was still a greater, the greatest of all, to follow—the coming of the Spirit. How could they help asking questions ? How could they forbear wanting to know more ? But direct answers were denied them. They were told to wait.

Never had their Master given His disciples a more difficult command to obey than that which was contained in the one word ' Wait.' In years gone by He had bid them ' Follow.' And, not many days before, they had received their great commission : ' Go ye and make disciples of all the nations.' And now, as they were eager to prove themselves worthy of the great trust committed to them, the hardest of all commands for earnest men is laid upon them—Wait.

1. There are many different kinds of waiting. There is the waiting of the virgins in the parable and of the slothful servant who thought within himself that his lord delayed his coming. On

[1] A. M. Mackay.

the other hand, there is the waiting of that other servant who stood with loins girded and ear alert to catch the lightest sound of the Lord's coming. And there is the waiting of the apostles.

(1) They waited *with expectation* 'for the promise of the Father.' Their minds must have gone back to those wonderful discourses of their Lord's in the week of His Passion, and to the promises which He then connected with the Father. 'I will pray the Father and he shall give you another comforter that he may abide with you for ever. He shall teach you all things.' So their waiting was not that of idleness, but that of earnest expectant men. It was not the waiting of sloth that desires nothing better than to fold the hands and let the golden hours of life pass away unused. Frederick W. Robertson likens such a waiting to the running of the water through the hands or lips of a marble statue in a public square or garden. The water flows on in a perpetual stream, and the figure stands there cold and passive, making no effort to arrest the gliding water. So many men wait, or rather sleep, and time passes ever more swiftly away from them. But such was not the waiting of the apostles. They were looking forward to work, hoping for and preparing for action.

¶ Dr Marcus Dods was Dr Whyte's immediate predecessor in the Principalship of the New College, and their friendship and co-operation in the ministry was unbroken for forty-six years. Dods was less than two years older than Whyte, but was eight years his senior in academic standing. He completed his theological course, and was admitted as a licentiate of the Free Church, in 1858. For six years thereafter he worked as assistant or as *locum tenens* in a church in Newcastle and in various Edinburgh churches, preaching to, and being passed over by, a long succession of vacant congregations the while. Towards the end of this time—such a time of hope deferred as few men of Dods' intellectual eminence and nobility of nature ever had to suffer—he wrote to his friend Taylor Innes, with a touch of ironic humour, that he was meditating a discourse on the sick man at the Pool of Bethesda, adding, 'He, however, had thirty-eight disappointments, I only twenty-one as yet.' How Dods turned his necessity of waiting to glorious gain may best be told in the words of Alexander Whyte, whose admiration steadily grew in depth during the eighteen months that followed their introduction: 'I will tell you what Marcus Dods did while he waited so long for his call. He worked at his desk every day and with all his might. Let any student, or any still-uncalled probationer, take down the six volumes of Lange's *Life of Christ*, and let him master the able and mature preface, and then turn over the learned notes and the minute index that our probationer contributed to that delightful book. And then no sooner was that piece of work finished than there began to come forth from the same probationer's lodgings volume after volume of his monumental edition of Augustine.' [1]

(2) And they waited *with prayer*. 'They continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.' This waiting time, therefore, was loyally used. During it they were gathering force. We are sometimes tempted to forget that the great question of life is, not whether there is work for us to do, but whether we are fit to do it. There is rich spiritual work for every man, wherever he may be placed on life's great chessboard. The sole question with us is as to our fitness for work. Then 'when the work is ready for the man and the man is ready for the work the two will be brought together.' Times of waiting come to us in seasons of sickness, or enforced solitude or bitter trouble and disappointment. And such things, like the solemn sound that pulses through the silence of an oriental evening from the slender Moslem minarets, are the call to prayer. Like the apostles we are bidden to wait in prayer. It is an unpopular truth that Mr Shorthouse's beautiful romance, *John Inglesant*, was written to enforce, namely, that 'the end of existence is not the good of one's neighbour but one's own culture.' 'This,' as has well been said, 'is not selfish as we might suppose, for only by strict attention to ourselves can we hope to be of use to others.' It is character, not work, that influences others. It is holiness, not activity, that tells, and these things are gained in prayer and waiting upon God.

¶ It is said of that mighty spirit of the Middle Ages, Bernard of Clairvaux, that he found 'on the days when he spent most time in prayer and in study of the Bible his letters were most rapidly written and persuasive, his

[1] G. F. Barbour, *The Life of Alexander Whyte*, 109.

active work the most quickly and successfully accomplished, and his own schemes were widened or lost in the greater purposes of God, anxiety was allayed, and the power of the Holy Spirit to which he had opened his heart was felt in every word he spoke, and in his very presence and look.' 'A gift,' says Goethe, 'shapes itself in stillness, but a character in the tumult of the world.' And the gift of spiritual power is the child of solitude.[1]

2. What was the result of the apostles' waiting?

(1) Like all real waiting upon God *it was extraordinarily fruitful.* In those ten days the apostles framed a general decision as to what the message was that they were to go forth and preach. It was to be the record of the Saviour's life, 'beginning from the baptism of John, until the day in which he was taken up.' Thus the first preaching of the gospel was marked by unity. No necessary part of the message must be left out. And so the form the first preaching of the apostles took was largely the result of these days of waiting and prayer. A common faith was preached by all alike. It afterwards became what we know as the Apostles' Creed. This body of Christian teaching is the inheritance of the Church. It has been one of the great offices of the Church to keep it whole and undefiled. As often as we profess our faith in the Apostles' Creed, we should remember that it is the faith that links us to the first days, the Church of the Upper Room, the Waiting Week of the Apostles. 'These are the words,' says Bishop Westcott, 'by which martyrs have lived and died, the words under which new nations have been enrolled as soldiers in Christ's army, the words which have remained through every vicissitude the standard of Christian Belief.' It is often said in modern days that 'it does not matter what a man believes as long as he lives rightly.' This is not considered true with regard to political or any other kind of belief. It must be a matter of the utmost importance whether we hold a right Faith or a wrong one.

¶ As the light of the sun colours the tiniest blade of grass, so the idea in the background of the mind tinges every detail of life. When we grant that a man's theology will be built on his belief, and will follow its lines to the highest pinnacle, it is a grudging concession, a limited analysis. The whole energy of a human life, however it may have been fed on the way, and whatever common wheels it may turn, arises from the spring among the hills. Belief gives the trend to politics, constitutes the rule of business, composes the atmosphere of home, and creates the horizon of the soul. It becomes the sovereign arbiter of our destinies, for character itself is the precipitate of belief.[1]

[1] F. J. Chavasse.

(2) Another result was *an increase in the apostolate.* Matthias was added to the number of the band. It seemed well to the apostles that their number should be kept to that of Christ's original appointment. The blank left by the traitor's death was therefore filled, and another steps forward to do the appointed work. Christ's work shall not remain undone, even though those who are first called to it hang back, fall away, and count themselves unworthy of such high honour. The blank being filled, the apostolic band, now complete again, waits to receive the promised Spirit. Not only were the faith, and the inner spirit important, but the outward organization also. We cannot have the spirit without the body, although the spirit is more important than the body.

And the promise came true. The Holy Spirit descended with mighty power on that little band of expectant and prayerful believers.

3. 'Wait for the promise of the Father.' That is the age-long lesson that we all have to learn. We hate the word and method alike in our hurrying, impatient time, when we desire to solve our problems and win our experiences the day after to-morrow. Yet it is both Christ's Word and Christ's method. It is the Word and method we need, not only for our great public questions, but for the inward experiences of the soul's life. Who is not seeking fuller, richer personal knowledge of God and of His Holy Spirit's working? What can we do? One thing, it is clear, we cannot do. We cannot force or manufacture spiritual experience any more than the disciples could by themselves obtain the Spirit which only God could bestow. Like them we must 'wait for the promise of the Father.' But like them we must learn that waiting is no mere idle, listless dreaming, but rather the maintenance of the

[1] John Watson, *The Mind of the Master*, 250.

attitude, the making of the atmosphere, in which alone the still small voice of the Spirit of God may reach our consciences, and strengthen our wills, and purify our affections, and inspire our souls. The first believers in those anxious waiting days held together in the brotherhood and unity of the Christian fellowship. They continued with one accord in prayer and supplication. They did the obvious task which lay nearest to their hands, trustfully seeking their Master's guidance. It is in some such conditions as these that we must seek to wait for the growing and deepening experiences which the Holy Spirit may bring to us. For 'though the vision tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not tarry.'

They gathered, the first church, at Pentecost,
To wait the coming of the Holy Ghost.
No passers-by glanced up to where they met;
The quiet vigil caused no stir—and, yet—
Could we but plead with such a faith as theirs,
What wonders might not follow our own prayers?

The Endowed Life

Acts i. 6-8.—'They therefore, when they were come together, asked him, saying, Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority. But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you.' (R.V.)

'DOST thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' What a tedious and tiresome question! The Lord had lived before men and among His disciples the very Life of God; He had spoken as never man spake; He had broken the bonds of death and visibly appeared again among His friends; and what they want to know is whether their little country on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean is to recover its political independence. How exasperatingly unperceptive! Yet we are bound to remember what that political independence meant for the devout Israelite. Israel was Church as much as nation, and its spiritual inheritance was of supreme dignity. The subjection of this people to the yoke of a foreign empire seemed to prohibit the free expression of a national obedience to God. Israel alone could show any such thing to the world, and Israel was prevented. Would the risen Christ create the opportunity?

He does not rebuke the question; He does not give a negative answer. He sets it aside as irrelevant.

They were asking for earthly dominion, He was for a spiritual dynamic. They wanted to make a broken people into a kingdom, He was waiting to make individual men into kings. 'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom?' 'Ye shall become kings, when the Holy Ghost is upon you.'

'Ye shall receive power.' Now what kind of power did Jesus mean? What kind of dynamic does the Holy Ghost bring to men? If the Holy Spirit were to take possession of our life now, what change would He make? What infirmities would be left behind, what new equipment gained if we should receive that power?

The best way to answer that question is to see what difference the Holy Spirit did make. When these men received what is here called 'the power of the Holy Spirit,' what changes took place in their character?

1. *There is an extraordinary power of spiritual apprehension.*—When they got the power of the Holy Ghost, they had a certain keen spiritual sense—a powerful feeling for God. Is it not the Apostle Paul who, in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, speaks of the benumbment of sin so affecting the life that life becomes past feeling? It is as though the soul were endowed with exquisite tendrils, and these tendrils reach out to feel God. One of the things, then, that came to the early disciples when they received the gift was this—an amazing refinement of spiritual apprehension, by which they became mysteriously and marvellously aware of the presence of God. They were not distinguished by this gift in the early days before the Spirit was given. Why, our Lord Himself describes them as slow, dull of heart, blunt in spiritual perception. But when we turn to the Acts of the Apostles we find that when they received the gift of the Spirit they could not get away from the sense of God's presence. Wherever they went, which ever kind of road it was through which they were walking, troubled and difficult, or smooth and leisurely, they felt their Lord was with them.

¶ I had a glimpse to-day of what the Presence of God is: an actual, a physical neighbourhood, not the least the shadowy, ghost-like existence of our common conception.[1]

Along with this sense of the Divine Presence we find, in the Acts of the Apostles, an equally refined perception of their Lord's will. When the Holy Spirit comes to you He gives you spiritual sight and you see the King; He gives you spiritual hearing, and you hear His voice; He gives you spiritual refinement, and you behold the Lord. Everywhere in the apostolic life there are communications between the Divine and the human. Sentences like these abound everywhere: 'The angel of the Lord said unto me'; 'And the spirit said to Philip, Go'; 'And the Lord said to Ananias.' There is everywhere this suggestion of an intimate knowledge of God's will. These men had keen senses by which they could hear voices—mystic, mysterious, spiritual voices. The voice of the King—why don't we hear it? It is a glorious thing to be able to add that not merely in apostolic times, but all down through the generations, whenever men and women have received the power of the Spirit of God, He has quickened their senses, and they are sensible that on the old road there is a new Friend, and their hearing is so quick that if He only whispers they respond.

¶ Jowett says: 'I have a friend in New York, a converted burglar. I made his acquaintance at Northfield, and we have kept up correspondence ever since. This man is working now in Mr Moody's School in Chicago. He says the only time he ever got into college was by the use of a jemmy. I asked him what happened when he received the power of the Spirit—not when he was immediately converted, though we can have the power then, but when he distinctly, apprehensively, and definitely got the power of the Spirit. And here I have got how he summed it up. He says, "I feel God everywhere."'

2. *They are distinguished by magnificent force of character.*—In the early days they were timorous, they were pliable, they were unfaithful, and in the supreme crisis they deserted their Master by flight. In the early days they were like reeds shaken by the wind. Do you remember that when Jeremiah was called to be a prophet he just bowed himself like a reed in the desert? He felt himself played on by the wind. And the Lord said, 'I will make thee as an iron pillar.'

And that is what happened in apostolic life. In the early days before the Spirit came the apostles were all pliable, frail, uncertain; but when the power of the Spirit came they became steady, positive, effective. They had got force of character, and their character had the two elements that always belong to the really powerful character; they had light and they had heat; not one without the other, but the two combined. They had light; they had the clarity of a clear, true purpose. Their outlook is not confused. If we watch them in the service of their Lord we find them never to be diverted from their track. 'This one thing I do.' They had this primary element in a forceful character, the clarity of an undivided aim. And the second element in a forceful character is heat, the fire of a quenchless enthusiasm. And they certainly had this fire in glorious strength and abundance. The Acts of the Apostles is a burning book. There is no cold or lukewarm patch from end to end. They had this central fire, from which every other purpose and faculty in the life gets its strength. This fire in the apostles' soul was like a furnace-fire in a great liner, which drives her through the tempests and through the envious and engulfing deep. Nothing could stop these men! Nothing could hinder their going! 'We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard.' 'We must obey God rather than man.' This strong imperative rings throughout all their doings and all their speech.

These men chose death for their life and shame for their boast,
For fear courage, for doubt intuition of faith,
Chose love that is strong as death and stronger than death
In the power of the Holy Ghost.[1]

3. *They received the energy of a glorious optimism.*—In the earlier days of the disciples they could not have been called children of hope. In the midst of apparent and threatening disaster were they not dismayed? But we turn to the Acts of the Apostles, and when

[1] *Lanoe Falconer*, 298.

[1] Christina G. Rossetti.

opposition began and threatenings were hurtling through the air, and imprisonment and death came near we find no despairing, no disheartening note. When the Holy Spirit came to these men they were optimists. And what is an optimist? He is a man who, to use Tennyson's phrase, can 'feel the days before him.' That is to say, an optimist is a man who can live in the sunny days of June even while he is in the dingy days of December. An optimist is a man who can believe in the best in the arrogant and aggressive presence of the worst. When persecuted 'they went everywhere preaching the word.' Isn't that real hopefulness? Isn't that living in the dawn in the very depths of midnight? And it was a radiant optimism, an unquenchable hope that the Holy Spirit endowed them with. St Paul, with the chain on his wrist, writes: 'Rejoice,' 'and again I say rejoice,' as if he could not say anything else. These men could not be held down. The spirit of optimism—a marvellous spirit of joy—was ever dominant.

¶ Joy and blithe serenity which received death with no alarm or self-abasement were the marked characteristics of the early Christians. St Luke throws a flood of light on the tone of their society—'drunken, but not with wine'; intoxicated, so to speak, with the rushing influences of Pentecost—when he says that 'they did take their food with exultation and singleness of heart.' The words indicate their bounding gladness, their simplicity and smoothness of feeling, as of a plain without stones, or a field without furrows.[1]

¶ When Mr Moody paid his first visit to England, Dr Dale attended the meetings to ascertain, if he could, the secret of the evangelist's extraordinary power. 'His preaching,' wrote Dr Dale, in recording his experience, 'his preaching had all the effect of Luther's; he exulted in the free grace of God. His joy was contagious. Men leaped out of darkness into light and lived a Christian life for ever afterwards.'[2]

What happened to these people when the Holy Spirit came upon them can happen to us. Does anyone know a promise that has been revoked? Can anybody point to a single resource that was offered to the Apostle Paul that is denied to us? It is the same power that is offered to us to fit us for our condition, to equip us for our life. And what are the terms on which that power is received? They are these: that we are willing to offer our life for God, that the offer be made in all sincerity, made in simplicity, made in humble trust upon the Lord Jesus Christ. It means that we are willing to give up our sins, to lay down our pride. It means that we are willing to receive the Lord as our guest, and to allow Him to rule and to dominate our lives.

[1] Dean Stanley.
[2] F. W. Boreham, *A Casket of Cameos*, 184.

Power from on High

Acts i. 8.—'Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.'

It is interesting to note that in the last moment of His visible life upon earth our Lord's thoughts circled round the idea of power. He has had a great deal to say about faith, and He has often talked about hope, and love, but in the last moment He does not mention either faith or hope or love. His mind dwells upon the idea of power. He has often talked about brotherhood and service and sacrifice, but at the very end He does not mention any one of the three. He is thinking entirely about power. He is thinking of the way in which His principles are going to be made effective in human life by the men who are to carry on His work.

We all know what power is in its relation to the things of this world, and the eagerness with which men are everywhere seeking it. If we ask why it is that so much is made of wealth or position or education, the answer is found in the word 'power.' Power is a great word even in its lower uses and applications. Painter, musician, orator, politician—every man wants power. It is considered something worth striving after. But beyond all this there is the kind of power which we call spiritual, referred to by our Lord, and for which He told His disciples to tarry in Jerusalem.

1. *The Source of this Power.*—What is the source of this power? The Saviour calls it 'power from on high' and the 'power of the Holy Ghost.' But when He makes use of such expressions we are not to imagine that spiritual power has one fountain and material power another. In all the universe there is but one

eternal mover. The force behind Niagara, or behind the tides, or tempests, or stars, is the same as that which is behind every baptism of the spirit, and every revival of religion, and every ingathering of souls, namely, the will of God. The same will that bids the lily grow, and rewards the labour of the husbandman, is the will that energises the Church and clothes her saints with might. So that when we talk of spiritual power we are no more in the region of mystery than when we talk of electric power, or chemical power, or any other kind of power. All proceed from the same will, and all become practically mighty only when the laws of that will are obeyed.

2. *The Nature of this Power.*—When we consider the nature of this power two characteristics strike us.

(1) *It is constant.*—One of our very common expressions nowadays is 'the generation of force.' We see a dynamo of large dimensions and we say, 'That is where the power is produced that lights our homes or that drives our cars.' But that is a very lax and liberal use of language, and can be tolerated only by courtesy. Man simply discovers and utilizes forces which have been in the world from the beginning. Steam and electricity and magnetism are not something new. We have nothing to-day the possibilities of which have not always existed.

This spiritual power is a fixed quantity—as fixed as the will of God. It does not come and go, ebb and flow like the tides, but is the same in fullness yesterday, to-day, and for ever. By forgetting this fact men are sometimes led into religious extravagances which are misleading. Christian people have often wrought themselves up to a great pitch of excitement, and exhausted themselves with emotional fervour, under the impression that these things were necessary to bring in the reluctant tides of spiritual power. They have acted on the assumption that God's will is impulsive, intermittent, variable. This has been a great weakness in the Church. Instead of grasping and holding on to the idea that this spiritual power is constant, that the Divine tide is always at the full, the feeling has been that it must be induced and coaxed and won back by various excitements. The scientific man is wiser. He does not interpret his forces in that way. 'The electrician never expects to get the power he is in search of by excitement, nor does he look for a sudden visitation of it, as though the invisibles he dealt with acted purely on caprice. Instead, he works quietly in a given direction, sure that by obeying the known conditions he will be reenforced by the power he invokes.' And there is nothing more needed by Christian people than a similar faith in the invariableness of this 'power from on high.'

As one goes back along the pathway of Church history one frequently comes upon men who served as great spiritual power-centres for the times in which they lived. They were so filled with the Holy Ghost that they communicated Divine life and enthusiasm to multitudes who came in contact with them. To come into the presence of such men was immediately to feel the glow and spell of something Divine. And if we look for the explanation of their preeminent spiritual power, we shall find it in the fact that they believed that the Source on which they had to draw was as constant as the stars, and kept themselves in constant communication with it.

(2) *It is available.*—The Bible certainly teaches that it is a resource intended for use, something to be drawn upon continually. Jesus would not allow His disciples to enter upon their work until they had it. As well for the bird to try to fly without wings, or the ship to sail without wind or steam. This power was everything. The question, then, as to its availability is in the highest degree practical. How may we become spiritual power-centres?

Let us take an illustration. Have we not, at some time or another, seen along the seashore little scum-covered puddles which, by an accumulation of debris, had been cut off from the play of the tides. There they were rotting and breeding malaria. What they needed to cleanse and to transform them was to open up the channels and let in the pure water of the pulsing ocean. And that is what we need. To open up the channels is not easy. It means sacrifice, self-denial, long waiting in some upper room, prayer and supplication; but to do it, to feel the pulse of God's life throbbing in us and inspiring us, to feel and know that our little pools on the shore are one with the Infinite Sea—the tides pouring in and out—is an experience worth a thousandfold more than it costs to secure it.

3. *The Need for this Power.*—Significant for all time was our Lord's command to 'tarry in Jerusalem.' Failure at the outset would have buried the infant Church beyond all hope of a resurrection. He saw how necessary it was that the disciples should succeed so conspicuously as to lift them and their cause into a prominence that would compel attention. And what did He do? He gave them no instruction as to methods. He put into their hands no programme at all except to begin there in the city, and not to begin until the pressure of Divine power was upon them. He outlined no campaign. He simply kept them waiting—waiting for power, waiting for an inflow of the Spirit. Well did He know that when the power came the methods would take care of themselves. They would preach with burning tongues to the multitudes. Life will always organize itself. Only let us have the Divine life pulsing through us and Divine work will be done.

¶ Dr W. R. Maltby said at a great student gathering some years ago, 'There is nothing in literature like the reiterated attempt in St Paul's letters to express the strength and volume of this surging life that made the early Christians more than victorious. In the effort to tell it he strains the language and mangles the grammar, so that it takes Dr Moffatt weeks to execute the necessary repairs. But even more significant than what he says is what he and others among those first Christians did. Absurdly unequipped as they were, with nothing but their message and their joy, they challenged those tremendous odds, and felt the humour of their doing so. "God chose," they said, "the weak things of the world to shame the strong, and the silly things to confound the wise, and the nonentities to make an end to the malentities."'

And what about to-day? Are there any signs of the Christian society of to-day taking up its own task with the enthusiasm and the buoyancy displayed by those men and women of the first century? In every generation the Christian society is confronted by the task, from which there is no escape, of sharing its life with the world in which it lives. Sometimes the world outside seems curiously unready to pay any heed. But to-day it is probably true that never in all history were there so many people in the world so disposed to give heed to the Christian message, and never in its long story has the Church been confronted by such a gigantic Christian opportunity. All the world over there is a wistful turning towards Christianity to see whether that religion can provide what is needed.

In the face of this golden opportunity it must be said in all honesty that the Church does seem to be stricken with something very like impotence. The organization of the Church has probably never been more efficient than it is now. And yet men and money are not forthcoming for God's work at home and abroad on anything like an adequate scale. We know that the power which was available for the early Christians is available for us also. But how is the Church to get it? In attempting to answer this question it needs to be said quite frankly that many of the petitions for power offered by religious people seem to be ill-considered and often thoroughly unreal. There is no need of frantic beseechings to God to pour out His spirit. For if what Christ told us of God is true, then it surely follows that the almighty power of God is there all the time for any person or group of people who will set about doing what He wants. Power is found in the path of obedience. God's power, the very power that raised Jesus from the dead, is at the disposal of any Church that will corporately embark on the Great Adventure—the adventure of making Jesus really supreme in its own fellowship, the adventure of following His way in a world estranged from Him.

And for ourselves. The Church is never going to explore these great possibilities unless and until we of the rank and file in our own humble fashion are exploring the secret and power in our own lives. Jesus Christ said quite plainly that if a man will let Him, the Spirit of God will come right inside a human personality so that it becomes a habitation and an instrument for God on earth. That is no special mystical experience. It is for ordinary men and women. We as Christians dare not be content with any lesser experience than that. It is chiefly a matter of making room; throwing out what is worthless and futile and inconsistent with Christ's values and making room for something different and something better. 'God is all round us, a breaking sea of light and love and truth and joy, and all our task is to let Him in.'

¶ I was standing on the wall of a great lock. Outside was a huge lake vessel about to enter. At my feet lay the empty lock—waiting. For what? *Waiting to be filled.* Away beyond lay great Lake Superior with its limitless abundance of supply, also waiting. Waiting for what? *Waiting for something to be done at the lock* ere the great lake could pour in its fullness. In a moment it was done. The lock-keeper reached out his hand and touched a steel lever. A little wicket gate sprang open under the magic touch. At once the water in the lock began to boil and seethe. As it seethed I saw it rapidly creep up the walls of the lock. In a few moments the lock was full. The great gates swung open and the huge ship floated into the lock now filled to the brim with the fullness inpoured from the waiting lake without.[1]

Christ's Witnesses

Acts i. 8.—'Ye shall be witnesses unto me.'

My disciples, My friends, My witnesses—that is the gradation of honour to which our Lord calls His children: first, that they shall learn in His school; then that they shall be so sure, through their learning, of His love and mercy that they may be able to share His secrets and become His friends; and then, when they are friends, they can be outspoken witnesses.

The word rendered 'witness' in our New Testament is the Greek word 'martyr,' which we have lifted unaltered into English. The word originally meant one who testifies; and it was natural that in times of persecution it should come to mean one who suffered for his testimony. After all, there is no moral difference between a man who dies for testifying and another who testifies in defiance of death. When a man enlists for the defence of his country, he there and then gives his life; he is no more a patriot because he falls, no less a patriot because he lives to share in the final triumph.

1. Witness-bearing is the one weapon which our Lord has appointed for the conquest of the world. It was the only weapon the apostles used, and which achieved success in the earliest, purest, strongest, most aggressive and most expansive period of the Church's history. It was not logical argument, neither was it impassioned or persuasive oratory, that 'turned the world upside down.'

Our Lord knew the difficulty of witness-bearing. And He had prepared for it by selecting men who would not be great preachers, who would not be great orators, who would not be great thinkers, but who would be men of such a character that they would be able to give a plain, unvarnished, simple record. These eleven men who were to go through the world with the record of the life of Jesus Christ were not men of wealth or position, they therefore were removed from all temptation to self-interest; they were not students or scholars, and therefore they were removed from the temptation that besets the scholar, which is, through his own bias or prejudice, to put something into the record which is not there. These men were, above all things, plain, simple, matter of fact. As it has been truly said, the chosen witnesses of Christ have just those qualities which a judge would point out to a jury as grounds for giving particular weight to their witness on questions of fact coming within their view.

Further than that, these eleven men were men of independent lives and varied temperaments. There was not one overmastering mind among them. They were men who would differ widely amongst themselves, and therefore, if their testimony was united about any one single fact, you might be sure that that fact was absolutely true. That they should always agree in an account of what they had seen and heard when by so doing they gained none of the objects of human desire, and when they were men so varied in their temperament—that gave the fact its own particular value.

More than that, these eleven men were so convinced of the facts which they proclaimed to the world that they were ready, not merely to sacrifice their positions—they had long done that—but to lay down their lives for the truth of that to which they bore their faithful testimony.

But it may be said that, even if that be granted, testimony is so fallible, so uncertain, that we should hardly like to risk everything upon testimony which has no better ground or basis than the fact that the witnesses were ready to lay down their lives for it. It is perfectly true that these men were fallible.

[1] J. H. M'Conkey.

Our Lord rebuked them for their forgetfulness. They were men so prosaic, as it were, so unable to understand the teaching at times that He was often obliged to explain to them.

But our Lord promised that just where they were defective He would supply the help that they needed. He tells them to wait at Jerusalem till they receive the power of the Holy Spirit. It is He who will quicken their memories and bring everything to their remembrance. It is He who will lead them into all the truth. And so we have this remarkable phenomenon: here are these eleven men who have to recollect out of a bewildering number of facts those which would tell, not for the satisfaction of the curiosity of their hearers, but for the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan. And any one who tries to put himself into their position, any one who has, in reading a biography, wondered why the biographer has put this in, and why he has left this out, is at once face to face with this extraordinary fact, that these men were able to do that which no biographer has ever done with anything like the same success. We cannot help feeling the truth of that expression of gratitude to which our Lord gave voice when He said: 'I thank thee, O Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent.'

2. The simple testimony of the Apostles can be read of all—theirs was a faithful witness. But what of ourselves? If we are disciples—if we have been taught anything in the school of Christ—why should we not witness to it?

¶ Ruskin once said, 'The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way.'

Is it competent to believe that the one reason why God gave us the power of speech was that we might bear witness to Him? Certainly the faculty of speech is never more nobly exercised than when in one way or another we are bearing witness to or claiming our relationship with God. The hushed voice of prayer, the raising of a hymn, the fearless announcement of a moral principle—these are examples of speech at its highest, when it fulfils, we may believe, its supreme office.

¶ We are told that Sir Walter Scott, when he was laying out the grounds at Abbotsford, placed a summer house in a very peculiar spot, and no one knew why he did it until he himself explained the reason years afterward. He had a coachman, old Peter, and during the years when a great burden of debt was laid upon the novelist's heart, and he was anguished almost to the point of despair, it was his custom to go out in the twilight to this summer house, which was near the cottage of the coachman. Every night old Peter opened his hymn-book and led his family in the singing of a good, old Scotch hymn, followed by one of the Psalms from his Bible. And there, as he listened in the darkness outside, his master was stayed and strengthened and kept true to the great task before him by the silent influence of his servant.[1]

The call to bear witness is a challenge to us to say what it is that, at the last and when we are alone, we believe and are prepared to trust ourselves to. What makes a man is the sense that he has committed himself. It is vain to try to buttress up and enliven our own personal faith by merely listening to arguments in support of it. Inactivity, want of outlet and expression—this, far more than doubt, obscures one's personal faith and makes it heavy and impotent. Where there is no hearty expression and no cheerful suffering for its sake we are making our soul not a home for our faith, but a tomb. And all because, having had ideals, dreams, strong instigations from God, we resisted their pressure and denied them air and freedom. There is nothing of such value in this world as to have a conviction concerning God and the unseen. And yet it is the simple truth to say that we never can have such a conviction until we turn some private feeling about God into a conviction by accepting it, and manifesting it, and—if life demands it—suffering for it.

Besides, we owe to all men the communication of whatever truth we are living by. In more hearts than we are aware of there is a pathetic watching and waiting for the arrival of one who seems from the very tone of his voice to have come upon truth—one who has something real and solid to say concerning some experience of God.

¶ One Sunday Thomas Henry Huxley was staying in a country town. 'I suppose you are going to Church,' he said to his friend. 'Yes,' said the friend. 'What if you stayed at home instead and talked to me about your religion?' 'No,' said his friend, 'I am not clever enough

[1] C. H. Elmore, in *The Record of Christian Work*, Oct. 1921.

to refute your arguments.' Huxley said, 'But what if you told me of your own experience, what religion has done for you?' So the friend stayed, and all through the forenoon they talked, and Huxley was told the story of what Christ had done for one man's life, and at the close of the interview the great scientist said, 'I would give my right hand if I could believe that.'[1]

There are whole companies of souls waiting, as birds wait in the twilight of the morning for the dawn—whole companies of souls waiting for some encouragement to come over heartily on the side of God, to break forth into singing. 'Ye are witnesses of these things.'

Christ's Commission

Acts i. 8.—'Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.'

'It is expedient for you that I go away,' the Lord had said to His disciples. Amazing, indeed, must be the value of Him for whose coming it was 'expedient' that they should lose the visible presence of their Lord. But so it was. We see the astounding transformation effected in the disciples' lives after they had received the Holy Spirit. We see in the Book of the Acts how they translated their gospel of joy into action and conduct. The Book is a record of how they carried out their great commission. No doubt they were somewhat startled and dismayed when they heard of witnessing in Judæa and Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth, for their thoughts did not travel far beyond a restored Jerusalem. But these ordinary men had learned many things since the old days before the Crucifixion, and they had now a faith and confidence in their Lord which nothing could shake, and which enabled them to accomplish the seemingly impossible task.

But how was it done? How did the Spirit lead them from city to city until they reached imperial Rome? Can we trace what happened to cause the forward movements, the extension of the frontiers?

1. There seem at any rate three decisive movements in the Apostolic Church. As to the first, we are told that there was *a great persecution against the Church.* That is the first widening of the circle. We read that they were scattered through the regions of Judæa and Samaria, and again that 'they that were scattered abroad travelled as far as Cyprus and some of them came to Antioch to preach the Lord Jesus.' So the first motive and movement of enlargement was through the ministry of persecution. Force and hostility breaking in upon the Church from the world broke up its concentrated fire and scattered its glowing coals until fires were kindled where souls were cold and dead. The Church extended herself through the bracing tonic of contradiction.

It is one of the most vivid, standing lessons of history that if a cause receives the favour of persecution it is in the certain way of expansion. The Christian faith has always multiplied its numbers when it has had to fight for its life. Its forces of propagation have become active in battle, and always inactive in the lotus fields of comfort and ease. That has been the experience of history, and it was the experience as taught by the Lord, in one of the Beatitudes in which He gives the laws of blessedness. 'Blessed are they that are persecuted,' He says; as if He meant, 'in the very fires of opposition they shall discover new strength.' There is that correlative canon, also pronounced by our Lord, 'Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you.' For when there is no hostility, He seems to say, 'You are in a realm of enervation, and enervation is always unfriendly to germination, and the hope of a strong and noble harvest is gone.' So we are dealing with a very familiar law in common life. The absence of impediment always means the decay of strength. Where there is no restriction there can never be any strong expansion. Hostility began in Jerusalem and the fire of the faith was carried through Judæa to Samaria, until, we are told, it found a place upon the remotest shores of Asia Minor.

¶ And there was never any persecution that came but we saw it was for good, and we looked upon it to be good as from God. And there was never any prisons or sufferings that I was in, but still it was for bringing multitudes more out of prison.[1]

How was it that the Church drew upon herself the hostility of the world when she began to

[1] H. T. Kerr, *The Gospel in Modern Poetry*, 46.

[1] George Fox.

expand? The things for which she was first persecuted were her clear, bold, authoritative message, her vivid teaching about Jesus—His power over death, His power over sin, His resurrection. They were always talking about the Resurrection. They preached the Resurrection, preached it dogmatically, preached it insistently. Their speech was bold, firm, unequivocal, never derived from set conventional standards, never paralysed by timidity. It challenged the hearer. It was straight, authoritative, imperative. That was the first thing the world heard. And there was another thing about that early Christian Church. There was the life that illustrated and confirmed the message. It was a life very well defined and separate from the world. It was a life that represented and reflected rare discipline but a rarer gaiety. It was bold, sacrificial, triumphant. These are the outstanding characteristics of the Apostolic Church, the message and the life, and these two aroused the antagonism through which the Church pushed back her frontiers and won new provinces to the honour and glory of her Lord.

If the first circle of the Church's inheritance was widened through the ministry of persecution, and the persecution was excited by the message and the life, what about to-day? If these two characteristics, the message and the life be weakened, the antagonism will be weakened, and the message of the Church may be so halting that no one is startled because no one is hit. The ideals of the message may be so vague and compromising that they excite no defiance. The life and habits of the Church may be so conventional, so formal as to be unnoticed in the common groove. How is it with us?

2. The first circle was widened into a larger one by the ministry of persecution. What is the next ministry of expansion? As they (the Church of Antioch) ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost separated him Barnabas and Saul and sent them away. There you are pushing back the frontiers; the circle will now spread and widen from Antioch until it includes all the regions of Asia Minor. What was the cause of the crisis? What was the motive of the movement? This: 'And the Holy Spirit said to the Church.' It is *the Divine impulsion of the Spirit of God.* The Church in Antioch was in the mood to feel the mystic impulsion and in that mood it discerned a certain purpose and said: 'It is God's.' We are not to suppose this little apostolic church heard the Spirit's voice in any other way than we should do to-day. It was *a prepared church.* 'They ministered to the Lord and fasted.' They met for worship, for prayer and for praise. Now, when we meet for worship, for prayer, and for praise, what happens? We surely refine our spiritual perceptions. That ministering to the Lord means that the Church at Antioch were refining their senses. Then when something was said to them they could hear. But it means more than the refinement of spiritual perception. It means ministry among the children of men. It means that these disciples brought their lowly homage unto the Lord, and to confirm their lowly homage they went out to render service and tender succour to the children of God. And then, there is one other teaching. 'They fasted'—they recognized that the body could be either friendly or unfriendly to the spirit, and they worried lest the grossness of the appetite should benumb the discernments of the soul.

The Holy Ghost is still saying, 'Separate me that man and that woman. I want the circle widened.' Are the senses of the Church fine enough to hear? Has the Church ears? Is she too luxurious to be virile; are we too self-indulgent to be discerning?

3. There is a third, more decisive, movement in the early years of the Church. It has now reached the western shores of Asia Minor. 'And a vision appeared to Paul in the night.' 'And there stood a man of Macedonia.' Right across the next frontier he appeared to him, saying: 'Come over, come over and help us.' The circle has now stretched across territories and touches Europe. The sound of the gospel has now reached our shores. What did it? This time *there came to a prepared soul a call.* You have got a surrendered, consecrated, purified soul, a man who is ready, one whose feet were always treading the red path of sacrificial service.

¶ Nay! our world has not sufficed for these evangelists; they have betaken themselves even to the ocean, and enclosed barbarian regions and the British Isles in their net. . . . What say I? Even the British Isles, which

lie outside the boundaries of our world and our sea, in the midst of the ocean itself, have experienced the power of the Word, for even there churches and altars have been set up.[1]

If we see no vision and hear no call, it may be that our spiritual senses are unexercised. We are numbed, insensitive. God cannot get at us. If that is so, let us open out our lives to the Highest. Stretch out the hand of faith, put it out, as Tennyson says, 'if it is lame and withered.' Surrender to the mystical movements of the Spirit and the Lord may say, 'Widen my circle and win that man,' or 'win that trade,' or 'widen my circle and help to win China.'

I know of a land that is sunk in shame,
Of hearts that faint and tire;
And I know of a name, a name, a name,
Can set that land on fire.
Its sound is a brand, its letters flame;
I know of a name, a name, a name,
Will set this land on fire.

The Ascension

Acts i. 9.—'While they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.'

THE great Forty Days were over—days which must have meant so much for the first disciples. But now the purpose of those mysterious days has been accomplished. And so the Lord meets in Jerusalem for the last time with the disciples, who were becoming conscious of the impending change. He leads them from the Upper Chamber across the Kedron and past Gethsemane towards Bethany—through scenes hallowed by countless tender associations. The little band gathered round their Master, the last solemn words were spoken, His hands were lifted in blessing, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. As Phillips Brooks says, 'I think that any man who had watched Jesus' life and understood its wondrousness, and then stood watching to see what would be that strange life's final scene, could have asked nothing more, could hardly even have cared to know the details of method—how this marvellous body had gone, where it had gone—but would have accepted and acknowledged the perfect fitness of the story, when the disciples with calm and solemn faces came back into Jerusalem and only said, "While He blessed us He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of our sight."' How quiet and calm, in the deepest sense of the word how natural, is the account of the Lord's departure. And yet blended with this lowliness there is a majesty and power in the Ascension that nobody will gainsay. One moment He was praying for them, and the next He was not, for God took Him. The eye cannot follow Him on that day when a cloud receives Him out of our sight. But certain things remain, truths about God and our human life, for which the story stands.

1. *Earth's View of Heaven.*—'Gazing up into Heaven.' Heaven has ever seemed a place inaccessible to earth. The natural man has indeed glimpses of the spiritual world, but he is incapable of sustained or satisfying vision of it. We love the earth and understand it well, but heaven is difficult to believe in, still more difficult to live for, leaving all for its sake.

Part of the reason for this is the want of the personal element. Spirituality without that is always tenuous and bleak. When a good man enters heaven, its aspect is to some extent changed for his friends. He is there, and the way by which he went seems open. Very different are the sorts of entrance. Some, like storm-beaten vessels, hardly struggle into port. Some, in perfect trim, finish their voyage gaily, the white sails taking the evening light. Some chosen spirits make us feel that for them the heavens are impatient, and with their pale, eager faces they show us far glimpses through the open gates.

¶ Henry Drummond's departure for the new country has made the other life for many, in an unspeakable degree, more real and more winsome.[1]

More home-like seems the vast unknown,
Since they have entered there;
To follow them were not so hard,
Wherever they may fare;
They cannot be where God is not,
On any sea or shore;
Whate'er betides, Thy love abides,
Our God, for evermore.[2]

But above all those who have died Jesus

[1] Chrysostom.

[1] W. Robertson Nicoll. [2] John White Chadwick.

Christ did this for us when He went to His own place. His future is no 'grand perhaps.' He had been as a man journeying into a far country, and now He has been welcomed home after that long wandering. It was His design to make heaven clear and homely to the eyes of earth; and the disciples now, looking upward, see Jesus Christ there and know it for their homeland. He has absorbed into Himself our whole thought of heaven: to die is to go to be with Christ. It is confessedly difficult to believe in spiritual things, here or hereafter. But it is not difficult to believe in Jesus Christ. It is easy to believe in Him, and He is there. He has entered as a 'Forerunner' within the veil, and the hope of following Him is the 'anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.' Into that other land He has led the way, and since He entered it our view of heaven has been different.

2. *Heaven's View of Earth.*—'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.' Earth's view of earth is always local. We see the part around our feet, but from the rest we are hedged in by all manner of barriers. But the Ascension of Jesus has taught us the heavenly point of view for earth, at which all local barriers are lost sight of.

There is a very intimate and emphatic connection between the Ascension and this wide outlook and command. In Greek and Hebrew thought alike, heaven was the privileged home of a select minority of distinguished persons, while the rest passed to a land of shadows, and the exceptional exaltation of the few made the general doom only the more apparent. But it was otherwise with Jesus. He came forth at first as a local Galilean prophet; at the last He appears in His disciples' preaching as the Lord of the world, the King of nations. But this expansion is directly connected with the narrative of the Ascension. Lifted up from the earth, He draws all men unto Himself. Those who in spirit are ascended with Christ not only see heaven but 'overlook the world.' Thousands of men and women, brethren in far lands, came into sight that day. The divisions of nationality, race, and class, and the barriers of aversion, prejudice, and ignorance, all were lost sight of. This is the characteristic note of the Ascension.

And having seen we must go forth into the newly discovered breadth of the world. All that is needed for conviction of the worth of foreign missions, and all other enterprises for the help of man by man, is that we ascend with Christ.

> Where'er the human heart doth wear
> Joy's mortal wreaths or sorrow's gyves,
> Where'er the human spirit strives
> After a life more pure and fair,
> This is the true man's birthplace grand,
> This is the world-wide fatherland.

3. *The Power of the Unseen.*—'All power is given unto me.' One would think that power, in the sense of influence, must be measured by visibility. What we see most clearly we feel most powerfully. Yet even in the material world there is abundant evidence that the greatest powers surrounding us are the invisible forces of Nature. And the access of spiritual power that came upon Christians after Jesus was no longer visible to their eyes, is one of the most remarkable facts in history.

When we remember the helplessness of the company of disciples huddled together after the Crucifixion, we might expect a paralysis of vital energy in the Church now that its Lord had finally vanished from the earth. Left alone, with their gigantic task among the nations, a feeble band pitted against the possibilities and impossibilities of the situation, surely the Church must feel its human weakness to the point of despair. But instead of this we find them returning to Jerusalem 'with great joy,' competent men who were adequate to their task. Evidently their faith had become a force now, and that force was a sense of the power of Christ.

For us and for all men Christ's secret of power is not visibility but exaltation. He is not seen but He is ascended. Lack of spiritual power is the result of unworthy and inadequate thoughts of Christ. Let us exalt Him in our hearts, for the more He is exalted, the greater is the might and effectiveness of faith.

4. *The Presence of the Absent.*—'Lo, I am with you alway.' The parting of Jesus from His friends really united them to Him. The earthly life had set limits of all kinds upon Him. He was here and not there, cut off from His friends by absence of the body. Now, He was

free in the spiritual land. He was with them always, not occasionally as before.

Where the many toil and suffer,
There am I among Mine own;
Where the tired workman sleepeth,
There am I with him alone.

Never more thou needest seek Me,
I am with thee everywhere:
Raise the stone, and thou shalt find Me;
Cleave the wood, and I am there.

And this meant for them the setting free of love, as only the Ascension could set it free. They needed access to Him, for their love longed for His fellowship, and their attempts at service often needed comfort. With His Ascension there came upon the world a new sense of the love it longed for made accessible. Christ's Ascension set love in the heights for ever; and from the heights that love for ever streams down upon mankind. The presence of the absent is precious chiefly for this, that neither height nor depth can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Last Message to Bethany

Acts i. 11-12.—'Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet.'

THE last day of Christ's fellowship is touched with pathos. Its counsels are high and serious. Its intercourse has not the freedom of the early years in Galilee. Its messages have a wisdom and a foresight which baffled the understanding of the disciples, and have amazed believing men to all time. But this closing day of Christ's sojourn with His disciples was one of full and close intimacy. It seems to have begun within the Upper Room, to have been continued in the conversation on the way, as Jesus 'led them as far as unto Bethany,' and to have been unexpectedly closed before the evening came by His ascension. It was while they were on the Mount of Olives, and close to the village of Bethany, that there came that last message, 'Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?'

When we examine the message we find it breaks up into three words. *A word of reproach*: 'Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?' *A word of prophecy*: 'This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go.' *A word of recall*: 'Then returned they unto Jerusalem.'

1. *The Word of Reproach.*—Every religious experience leads us into a world of mystery. It is the expression of a life which is more wonderful and more vital than that which leaps in the red blood of our veins, and that life is wonderful and vital enough. It declares the certainty of the unseen, and of the infinite in wisdom and power. The Christian religion has one mystery beyond all others. It focuses both faith and hope on the presence and power of the Divine personality of Jesus. That is its transcendent truth, and only when that is accepted can the other mysteries be understood or even considered. Yet these gracious mysteries are so appealing and so engrossing that they have become a snare to devout minds. They lift men's eyes from the simplicities and the realities of daily life, and keep eager spirits away from the more costly but more Christlike services of life. It is to this attitude that the word of reproach is addressed, 'Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?'

Now what are the perils of this unprofitable gazing?

(1) One of them is that of absorption in religious speculation. These gazers up into the heavens are filled with an almost overmastering curiosity, and of this curiosity religious speculation is the child. The questions of whence, and whither, hold their minds, so that they almost ignore Christ's pleading calls and His imperative commands. The mercies of salvation and the beauty of holiness pass out of the foreground. There are men to whom a problem is more interesting than a truth. There are minds which find their highest exercise in dealing with questions. There are sects and coteries which seem heedless of the supreme certainties of the Christian faith and its high calling in the ardour of their discussions on what lies beyond human ken. How unprofitable it all is! How it is reproached by this voice from heaven!

(2) The second peril is indulgence in religious emotion. There is no danger that our hearts will be too often uplifted to heaven provided that we are seeking light and strength to do the Master's will. But this lifting up of the eyes may become a devotion which we practise because of its ecstasy. To meditate on Jesus, to recall His sufferings, to lie prostrate in adoration before Him, to be moved by the surcharged emotion of a great multitude when some tender hymn quickens all their feelings, have their own place and function. But there is always the peril that this rapture will be sought as an indulgence to the soul, in the same way as wine is sought for the stimulation of the senses. There are still some who think that gazing up into heaven is the flood-tide of religious attainment. But the true saints are the men to whom the interests of earth are full of concern, who can speak of love, and home, and friendship, of the little child at his play, and the needs of men at their toil, who refuse to indulge themselves in unprofitable gazing.

¶ Ruskin has set this reproach in an impassioned protest: 'Try to conceive the quantity of time, and of excited and thrilling emotion, which have been wasted by the tender and delicate women of Christendom during these last six hundred years, in thus picturing to themselves, under the influence of such imagery, the bodily pain, long since passed, of One Person. . . . If they had but been taught to measure with their pitiful thoughts the tortures of battle-fields—the slowly consuming plagues of death in the starving children, and wasted age, . . . nay, in our own life of peace, the agony of unnurtured, untaught, unhelped creatures, awaking at the grave's edge to know how they should have lived; and the worse pain of those whose existence, not the ceasing of it, is death; those to whom the cradle was a curse, and for whom the words they cannot hear, "ashes to ashes," are all that they have ever received of benediction. These—you who would fain have wept at His feet, or stood by His cross—these you have always with you! Him, you have not always.'[1]

¶ A modern scholar has pointed out that the New Testament, like Greek literature at its best, avoids anything like sentimentalism. There is no encouragement of vague fancies in Christianity. The reality of life's duties is insisted on with impressive clarity of vision and firmness of aim. While emotion is evoked, it never ends in itself, but is intended to be preparatory to and the accompaniment of action. Feeling which evaporates without bearing fruit leads to the sure failure of moral vigour.

He who lets his feelings run
In soft luxurious flow,
Shrinks when hard service must be done,
And faints at every woe.[1]

2. *The Word of Prophecy.*—'This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go.' That was the intimation that Jesus had not simply vanished out of their sight, to come again, perhaps, on the morrow, to speak with them in the Upper Room, or as they walked by the way. It was the message that He would come back the same Jesus, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. They might not see the print of the nails. They might not eat of the fish by the lake of Galilee. But they would sit with Him, and walk with Him, in the deeper and unimpeded fellowship of the spirit.

We know how that prophecy haunted and held the mind of the early Church. These first believers lived day by day awaiting the coming of the Lord. The Epistles are strewn, more largely than the casual reader recognizes, with confident declarations of the speedy return of Christ. This expectation coloured all their thoughts, gave emphasis to their teaching, and almost abrogated the full energy of their lives. That very prophecy whose purpose was to rouse men from gazing up into heaven was so pitifully misinterpreted that it led them to do almost nothing else.

Wherein was the early Church mistaken, for mistaken it was? Wherein did these devout and ardent men and women err, for err they did?

(1) They went astray in their endeavour to make the tables of human arithmetic measure the times and seasons of the Divine fulfilment. They thought to set down the day and the hour of the Lord's coming in the petty calendar which records the revolutions of the moon. They did not remember, un-

[1] Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, § 57.

[1] *Life's True Values*: Selected Essays from 'The Times,' i. 192.

til one inspired teacher uttered his warning, that ' One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' They had forgotten the word of Jesus, ' It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power.' They ignored the clear word of Christ, ' But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the son but the Father.' That error still clouds devout minds to their loss.

(2) They erred also in their interpretation of this prophetic word. We may be bold enough to wonder at their blindness, when we recall the striking object lesson given them in the misrepresentation of the Messianic prophecies of Israel. The Jews had read the Old Testament with a veil upon their hearts, and they had not seen clearly the truth written in the great prophecies of the coming Messiah. They had read them as promises of a worldly triumph. They were ' all waiting for a king to slay their foes, and lift them high.' When Jesus came, they knew Him not, and they received Him not. His cradle and His cross were both an offence unto them. So these early believers misinterpreted the prophecies of the coming Lord. We must take heed lest we also turn the deep parables and the glowing figures of the New Testament into stones of stumbling, when we interpret them under the influence of our earthly desires. They are great words whose truth shall one day be made plain in a higher, nobler, and more wondrous way than any human heart has yet imagined.

(3) But the early believers erred most of all in their understanding of the purpose of the prophecy. It was given to comfort, and to inspire, and to be cherished as one supreme motive for service. The key to the interpretation of the purpose of this promise is to be found in the parables of the Lord. He spoke of Himself as the king who has gone on a journey for a long time, when he will return to take account of his servants. He called Himself the master of the household, who had left his steward to serve, and his porter to watch at the gate. The supreme obligation, therefore, was to faithful service.

3. *The Word of Recall.*—This last message consummates in this word of recall. It is not on the angels' lips, but their reproach and prophecy bring men's minds back to the Master's call. These disciples had been led out to Bethany. They had seen its transcendent sight. But that vision was neither for their reverie, nor for their speculation, as they were tempted to think. It came, like every other vision, to move them to a new obedience. So these men returned from Bethany to Jerusalem to worship and to serve, to witness to Christ and to die for His name.

That is why God gives us all our visions, and why we still go out to Bethany at times to see heaven opened. We go not for wonder, not for rapture, but for direction. All life cannot be dramatically heroic. All our days cannot be glorious with a pulsing emotion. All our years cannot be years of youth and zest and hope. There are days of drudgery and of dullness, of pain and of tears. There are years when we must feel our strength decline, and the edge of our delight blunted. There is an hour when we must die. But, ever and again, we shall receive a renewal of the vision, and it shall be a recall to Christ and to His command, with a re-energizing of all our powers.

¶ Wordsworth has set the beauty and nobility of this obedience in his perfect words of the sonnet on John Milton. Milton's life was troubled, smitten by poverty, limited by the affliction of his blindness, and shadowed by the sorrow of his home. Yet no man ever saw heaven opened with more gladness, and no man was ever more uplifted by the things of Christ. In his shining tribute Wordsworth sets in clear light the truth up to which this last message rises, that every vision must be turned into a holy obedience:

Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.[1]

[1] W. M. Clow, *Idylls of Bethany*, 197.

A New Spiritual Force

Acts i. 12-14.—'Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.'

It is not often that farewells are victories; they are more frequently tragedies. But, instead of being a tragedy, the farewell of our Lord was the crowning hour of all He had lived for—the coronation of His work. And as the Cross was nigh unto the city, so the scene of His triumph was within a Sabbath day's journey of Jerusalem, a distance of not more than three-quarters of a mile.

1. In witnessing the Master's departure, the true meaning of the Incarnation flashed into the disciples' souls. In a moment it all grew real, and true, and beautiful; the men were amazed, and ashamed at not having grasped the idea sooner. Lowly and reverently they bent down and worshipped.

The experience sent them home with a new joy in their hearts; and that joy inspired them with a new resolve. They felt they must away back to the city, and communicate the great, glad tidings to the faithful friends awaiting their return. The fact that they determined to go back at once to Jerusalem was proof of their full appreciation of the hopefulness of the situation. For there was undoubtedly great risk in doing so. Had they been disappointed and disheartened with the sudden translation of their Lord to heaven, they might have agreed to disband, and quietly and secretly to find their way back to Galilee, as men mindful mostly of their own safety. But they had come to the parting of the ways. And nobly and fearlessly they made their choice. Like heroes they nailed their colours to the mast. They must needs give implicit obedience to the marching orders of their great Commander. Thus they took the step that compelled them to break for ever with their past. The time was when they arose, one after another, and left all and followed Him. They were now to confirm and enhance that great renunciation.

2. When the disciples reached the city they naturally and instinctively sought the Upper Room. Epiphanius says that when Hadrian came to Jerusalem he found the Temple desolate and but a few houses standing. This 'little church of God,' however, remained; and Nicephorus says that the Empress Helena enclosed it in her larger church. It was probably the room in which the Supper had been celebrated, and was to be associated with the power of the risen as it had been with the suffering of the humiliated Christ. This upper chamber at Jerusalem, a city in the last days of its troubled existence, contained the whole number of those who acknowledged Christ as their Master. Measured by any worldly standard, anything feebler or more absolutely insignificant than the company gathered there cannot be imagined. But the grain of mustard seed was to become a tree in which the birds of the air should make their nests; the little leaven was to leaven the whole lump.

The gathering in the Upper Room represented no organization. It was simply a company of men possessed by enthusiasm and conviction. This enthusiasm we sadly need in our religion to-day. It is the spirit of a living Church, the crowning feature of Christian character, the paramount requisite for the extension of Christ's Kingdom.

When these sincere and devout men and women came to put the Risen Lord in His rightful place in heaven, then everything else came to fit in and balance itself in true proportion. The Christ on the throne gave a new grandeur to the Christ on the Cross. The Divine glory of the Man Christ Jesus dominated their entire conception of His character and mission and work, and so they did Him homage, and humbly worshipped Him then and there.

¶ 'The Mission was wonderfully blessed of God,' wrote Father Stanton on one occasion to his sister. 'All around about the place they thought it would never succeed, and nobody would ever come to church so many times every day. It is because people never realized that all love, all enthusiasm, all devotion, after all must be centred in God and God alone, and the preaching of Jesus, however simply, if in earnest, is like a loadstone which draws out souls in what is really a miraculous way.' [1]

[1] G. W. E. Russell, *Arthur Stanton: A Memoir*, 80.

3. One feels as if it were little short of sacrilege to intrude upon these devoutly exercised worshippers in the Upper Room. And yet it forms such an epoch in their religious life, and such a memorable and well-defined landmark in their spiritual history, that great life-lessons for the Church in all times are taught and learnt in the thrilling story.

¶ When Ethelred, the Saxon king of Northumberland, invaded Wales, and was about to give battle to the Britons, he observed near the enemy a host of unarmed men. He inquired who they were and what they were doing. He was told they were the monks of Bangor praying for the success of their countrymen. 'Then,' said the heathen prince, 'they have begun the fight against us: attack them first!' [1]

(1) Prayer is action; as action may be itself a prayer. And there are times of waiting for all when prayer is the only possible action. The transactions between the spirit and God are the most real of all, and are ever followed by significant results. This was social prayer. True prayer requires at times solitude and at times society. We need the help of one another in the pursuit of truth. Plato spoke of the 'joint striving of souls' in philosophy. Common prayer is the joint striving of souls to lay hold upon the strength of God. 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.' It was persevering, continuous prayer, as all exertion of the spirit must be to attain worthy ends. Thus was the mind of the Church calmed, and its intelligence cleared for insight into the business of the Kingdom.

¶ The confidence of George Fox in the real presence of God was the root of his power in the ministry. Penn tells us that the abruptness and brokenness of his sentences, the uncouthness of some of his expressions, which were 'unfashionable to nice ears,' showed beyond all contradiction that God sent him. But the truest mark of his nearness to God, Penn rightly discerned in the character of his prayers. Fox moved England by prayer.

(2) To the company and unanimity of the apostles were added 'the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brethren.'

A remarkable painting represents Mary, shaken by grief, supported by the beloved disciple, turning away from the Cross. In her left hand she holds the crown of thorns. The thought of the painter appears to be that she will retain that coronet of twisted spines as a memorial of the great atonement. But when, after the Cross and after the Resurrection, we find her in the Upper Room, she is about to receive a more enduring token of the mighty sacrifice. She awaits the gift of the Spirit, the quivering crown of flame. Henceforward the unbroken course of her life shall be a holy recollection of her Son and Lord, her every deed a due observance of His will.

¶ The Mary of myth is a queen, a mediatrix, an object of worship, a hearer of prayer. The Mary of fact is a poor woman, pure and simple, often mistaken, often reproved, though always humble and resigned. She is seen not queening it proudly over others—not presuming anything because of her relation to the Lord Jesus—rather the great Divine lessons well learnt, we see Mary, the Mother of Jesus, with the brothers, with the women, and with all the lowly company of Christ's, 'continuing steadfastly in prayer'; bowing her great soul humbly before the Throne of God. As the curtain of history rose so it falls on Mary praying. The life of the Mother of Jesus was rounded with prayer. To the last she was the bondmaid of the Lord.[1]

(3) It was this continuing in prayer on the part of the apostles, and on the part of the holy women, that led, ten days afterwards, to Pentecost and to the birth of the Church of Christ; and ever is it true that the continuing steadfast in prayer leads to fresh pentecostal gifts, and leads to fresh outpouring of the Spirit, that men and women may do the work to which the Master has called them. Let us continue in that spirit, and the result must be fresh gifts of Pentecost and fresh workers to win the world for Christ.

[1] J. Morgan, *The Ministry of the Holy Ghost.*

The Second Place

Acts i. 23-26.—'And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. . . . And they gave lots for them; and the lot fell upon Matthias.' (R.V.)

THE prayer for Divine guidance was over. Two small tablets, each bearing the name of a candidate, were placed in an urn, which was rapidly shaken, and with intense excitement

[1] J. M. Gibbon.

the company watched curiously to see which would fall out. Presently one dropped on the floor. Amid breathless suspense it was picked up and read. The name of the new apostle was Matthias!

'The lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.' The lot fell on him, and the curtain fell on him. He is never heard of afterwards. It has been sometimes supposed that his obscurity meant a silent censure of God upon the hasty and superstitious way in which the vacancy was filled up. But, however this may be, we cannot help feeling more interested in Justus than in Matthias. We wonder how he took his defeat. History does nothing to satisfy our curiosity or whet our imagination on this point, for we know as little about Justus as we do about his successful rival; but most of us know at some time or in some way what it means to be assigned the second place in life.

¶ The great fault, I think, in our missions is that no one likes to be second. There is an evil in that, inasmuch as it prevents the division of labour. Perhaps the advantages predominate, but I have not been able to perceive them. It is said our Saviour made no distinction among His disciples. It may be asked, on the other hand, are inspired apostles in all things an example to uninspired missionaries?

Blessed is the man and woman, wrote Mary Slessor many years later, who is able to serve cheerfully in the second rank—a big test.[1]

If Justus had been originally a disciple of John the Baptist, as is quite probable, the magnanimity of his master may have helped him to accept the situation bravely. The least member of the Divine kingdom may have been greater than John, but John, by his behaviour towards Jesus, showed that in one point at any rate his soul was greater than many who had a fuller position of religious privilege. 'He must increase, but I must decrease. This my joy therefore is fulfilled.' The man who could say that had purged his nature from every atom of self-importance or conceit, and it is to be hoped that Justus was heroic enough to rise to the same level of generosity. If he did rise to it, he must have conquered any jealousy in his relations with Matthias and the rest, and that was no trivial victory. There is no jealousy like professional jealousy.

[1] *Robert Morrison*, 104.

¶ There is a passage in Professor Saintsbury's tribute to Sir Sidney Lee in the *Times* in which he says: 'I have known the late Sir Sidney Lee for very many years and my literary acquaintance has been tolerably extensive. He is about the only man, I think, of the whole lot of us (including myself) from whom I have never heard an unkind speech about a fellow-craftsman.'

It is no disgrace, it is not even much of a trial, to be passed over in favour of some one who is conspicuously distinguished or who has pre-eminent claims to a position. The ordeal comes when we are thrown into rivalry with our equals. And that was the discipline of Justus Barsabbas. Both he and Matthias had the same qualifications and experience. But the lot fell on Matthias. Matthias got the coveted position. What Justus Barsabbas got was the opportunity of the second place, the opportunity of showing the magnanimity that was in him, upon one of those trying emergencies which reveal how far a man is capable of forgetting himself and of subordinating his personal ambitions in order to rejoice in the superiority of others and in the common good.

1. The conviction that the second place is our lot does not always come home to us with such dramatic suddenness. It often breaks slowly upon the mind. It is not an experience of youth, for although we get our defeats and disappointments in the early days, and although rebuffs seem crushing at the time, still life is in the making, and the spirits are naturally buoyant. A change comes as we approach and enter middle age. People look around them, to find, on comparing their position with that of their contemporaries, that they are not likely ever to attain the front rank or even the position which at one time it seemed reasonable to expect that they might achieve. It breaks on them that they lack sufficient force of character or energy of mind. No one admits that to himself without a secret pang of disappointment or even resentment. But when we cannot shut our eyes to the situation any longer, it becomes an opportunity for showing the spirit and stuff we are made of. The sensitive nature is tempted by self-pity to let itself be drawn down into melancholy. The stronger nature is apt to show its fibre by an attitude of umbrage to the world. Between

these two extremes, the sterling soul will continue to hold on its way, with the cheery, half-humorous confession :

In me there dwells
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch
Of greatness to know well I am not great.

2. There are some plausible consolations which we must refuse at all costs in the second place. One is disparagement of the first place. Success, no doubt, has its own penalties, and a high place is rarely a bed of roses, but it is a poor business for the unsuccessful to try to extract alleviations from such acid reflections. The second place has ample compensations of its own. We can and we should enjoy these without belittling the honour and opportunities of the first place. Another trick of our wounded self-love is to disparage those who have been promoted over our heads, by insinuating that while they may be superior in fortune and influence and popularity, they are deficient in other qualities in which, the inference is, we ourselves are strong. This is a miserable habit into which to fall. It means that we grudge them their good luck, and that we are trying to drag them down by reflecting on their deficiencies.

The discipline of disappointment in any shape or form is a test of the reality of character. Some who are too strong or too proud to let any expression of exasperation escape their lips will often assume a composure which is unnatural. They have too much self-respect to betray their feelings, even privately. When the matter has to be mentioned they will pose as if they really did not care one way or another. It is on all accounts better to be natural and to confess that one is made of flesh and blood like the rest of the race. After all, it is no discredit to bleed when one is pricked in an honourable struggle. The discreditable thing is to parade one's wounds or to whine under them weakly. That is discreditable and too common. That is why we cannot help admiring the man who, after some rebuff or defeat, in which no personal disgrace attached to him, accepts the situation manfully, neither giving way to the irritation of wounded self-esteem nor pretending loftily that nothing of any consequence has happened, but bestirring himself to take the discipline naturally and sweetly.

How does he do it ? Mainly by realizing, as any sensible and religious soul can do, if he chooses, that even the second place is an honour. To serve God in any place is an honour. Justus had been a disciple of Jesus from the beginning. He had received a training which many in the early Church had not been privileged to enjoy. He could speak of Jesus from personal knowledge as one whom he had both seen and loved. He might not have the position which he coveted among the twelve apostles, but he had a great vocation nevertheless, and the probability is that he set himself down, like a humble and heroic soul, to persevere with his calling, just as if nothing had occurred to fire his ambition. The dream of a high place had come to him unexpectedly. It had broken. But the business of his life remained. Faith and discipleship were not a dream, and there, down among the unbroken relationships and responsibilities of the second place, God was still waiting for him.

3. The call is to go on with the old work as thoroughly and contentedly as possible. But that requires some nerve and grit. There are people who seem never to recover from the ordeal of having been passed over. Either they become soured and aggrieved, or else they return to the old tasks with an air of listlessness and detachment. They are convinced they were meant for a more responsible and honourable position than has been assigned to them. Perhaps they were. But to cherish such feelings is worse than folly. Why can't they see, as every one else does, that it is bound to spoil their effectiveness no less than their peace of mind ? For while God can do a great deal of first-rate work by means of second-rate men and women, a soured nature, even though its materials are first-class, is useless to Him, and useless for the simple reason that it has become egotistical at the core. It is absurd to think that, since a first place has been denied us, we are really too good for any lower duty.

¶ First officers are often worse than skippers, remarked the night watchman. In the first place, they know they ain't skippers, and that alone is enough to put 'em in a bad temper, especially if they've 'ad their certificate a good many years, and can't get a vacancy.[1]

¶ The motto, ' Cæsar or nobody,' has been the favourite of many people, distinguished and

[1] W. W. Jacobs, *Light Freights.*

second-rate, notably of a man like Cardinal Manning, but it has no currency within the Kingdom of God.

Fortunately, the discipline of the second place is more bravely borne by many. Their nature is cast in larger moulds. They are alive to the need of keeping a strict watch on that dangerous border-line between legitimate ambition and selfish craving. They school themselves to think of the cause more than of their personal interests, and because they are strong and sensible enough to see that the habit of dwelling on disappointments only intensifies them, they refuse to insinuate any sentimental plea, in word or look, for sympathy. What they believe in supremely is the justice and wisdom of the Lord whom they have undertaken to serve.

¶ Perhaps no one has put this more admirably than Sir William Rowan Hamilton in one of his sonnets—

O brooding Spirit of Wisdom and of Love,
Whose mighty wings even now o'ershadow me ;
Absorb me in thine own immensity,
And raise me far my finite self above !
Purge vanity away and the weak care
That name or fame of me should widely spread ;
And the deep wish keep burning in their stead
Thy blissful influence afar to bear,
Or see it borne ! Let no desire of ease,
No lack of courage, faith, or love, delay
My own steps in that high thought-paven way,
In which my soul her clear commission sees :
Yet with an equal joy let me behold
Thy chariot o'er that way by others roll'd.

Justus is the unofficial apostle of all who are put into the second place in life, of the commonplace natures who come very near distinction but miss it, of the disappointed, of the men and women who, in our phrase, never seem to get their right place in this world. The lot falls. Popularity, happiness, success, health, outlets for energy ; these fall to this one and to that. But there is always some one being passed over ; we don't see why, they don't see why. We meet people who have to put up with what is obviously for them the second best—excellent, deserving souls who remind us of Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada : 'He was more honourable than the thirty, but he attained not to the first three.' A man who fares thus, if he is of a healthy nature, will accept his rank from the hands of God and do his best. He will say, 'It pleased God, and it must please me.'

It was the only hope I had
That unto near fulfilment grew ;
A while it made me very glad,
A while it made me very sad ;
And then I knew
'Twas but another thread He wove
In the mixed web of Father-love.

How Judas Fell Away

Acts i. 25.—'This ministry and apostleship, from which Judas fell away.' (R.V.)

Judas had capacity for handling money. And so the Lord, who gives us all our talents to trade with, and 'to every man his work,' made Judas the treasurer of this little brotherhood. It is the custom at a Masonic banquet for the treasurer to occupy the seat on the left hand of the chairman. It was probably that seat which was occupied by Judas at the Last Supper. According to Edersheim, St John sat on Christ's right hand, and Judas on His left. 'He had the bag.' There is nothing originally sinister in the phrase. Do not let us begin to colour our present conception of him by the thought of the future. It was perfectly right that he should have the bag. Some one had to have it, and it was given to the one who had the greatest capacity ; and, as our Lord said : 'The light of the body is the eye : therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light.' Judas had a single eye when he first took the bag, and his body was radiant with the light of Jesus.

In the same chapter in which our Lord said those words, however, He warned men that when the devil is gone out of a man he wanders about restless ; then he comes, and looks in through the windows of the old tenement and says : 'I will return unto my house whence I came.' But he can only return if he finds the house empty as well as swept and garnished. And, alas ! it is true that Judas' heart was like that. The devil had been cast out, but somehow Jesus Christ never was enthroned. And so the result came which our Lord said would come : 'Then he taketh to him seven other

spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in and dwell there.' And his last condition is worse than his first.

Let us think of seven devils that came unto Judas.

1. The first was *the devil of disloyalty.* About a year before Jesus Christ was crucified He wrought a great miracle, the feeding of the five thousand; the people were so excited that they said: 'Here is the Messiah'; and they were going by force to make Him a King. But our Lord withdrew; His Kingdom was not of this world, else would His servants have fought. He would have no rioting in a popular movement of a nationalist character to put Him on the throne. Judas' heart was bitterly disappointed. He was treasurer; he would be Chancellor of the Exchequer in the days that were coming; and that dream seemed to be vanishing away. At the end of that chapter we read that our Lord's words divided the multitude into two—an effect they often have. Do not think that if Jesus Christ preached the whole congregation would be converted. Some would go out and say, 'We have never heard it after this fashion,' and would decide to follow Him; but a great proportion would go out and say, 'These things are too hard for us.' Now Christ asks, 'Will ye also go away?' And St Peter replies, 'Where else can we go? you only have the words of eternal life.' But the Lord says: 'Even among you there is one who is now an enemy.' Within twelve months the cloven hoof is beginning to be seen in the footprints of the apostolic band. Men who have been in fight say that one of the symptoms of incipient cowardice is the furtive glance over the shoulder, preliminary to running away. Judas had taken the look over his shoulder: 'No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back over his shoulder, is fit for the kingdom of God.' Judas was doing that; and the demon of disloyalty came.

¶ The deed of Judas has been attributed to far-reaching views, and the wish to hasten his Master's declaration of Himself as the Messiah. Perhaps—I will not maintain the contrary—Judas represented his motive in this way, and felt justified in his traitorous kiss; but my belief that he deserved, metaphorically speaking, to be where Dante saw him, at the bottom of the Malebolge, would not be the less strong because he was not convinced that his action was detestable. I refuse to accept a man who has the stomach for such treachery, as a hero impatient for the redemption of mankind and for the beginning of a reign when the kisses shall be those of peace and righteousness.[1]

2. In its train there came a second—*the devil of dishonesty.* Judas had no chance of making money in those days, so he took it instead. The devil says: 'Men must get on.' Of course such a breach of the law of honesty makes us recoil, and say: 'Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?' But, nevertheless, if we really examine our own lives in the searchlight of the Spirit of God, we shall sometimes have to look back and say that there were points here and there where we did break in some way the law of honesty. Above all, we shall have to own that when we keep back from God that which is His, when we spend on ourselves that which really belongs to His Kingdom, when we refuse to give to His poor, when we keep for ourselves all that He gives us, we are forgetting the word which says: 'Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price.'

¶ Each of us is not only God's workman but His steward. He has a duty of distribution as well as of accumulation laid upon him. God expects every man to have bestowed so much as well as laboured so much before his time comes.[2]

3. There came next *the devil of meanness.* Judas began to begrudge the presents given to Jesus Christ. There were a number of wealthy people who saw that the Master never looked after Himself; He was so busy at times that He had no leisure so much as to eat. And so Joanna, who was the wife of Herod's chamberlain, and a number of other women who had money, said: 'We will see to it that Jesus does not go hungry.' And so they followed Him, and ministered to Him of their substance. And the bag that Judas carried was often heavy, and he began to think that he had fat pickings ahead. Then there came a night when Mary, in a gust of penitence, broke a precious casket, because she could not open it, and poured the valuable contents on the Master's head. Judas said, 'Three hundred pence (nine pounds)!

[1] George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such.*
[2] R. W. Barbour.

What waste!' Hark to the tone of it. Disappointed greed.

Is it ever waste to be lavish in love? We cannot be sure. But we can be quite certain that it is never waste to be extravagant in love to Jesus Christ. So here the third devil enters in and takes his place. We can still hear the Judas tone, 'Collection for Foreign Missions? I am not going to church to-day. I do not believe in sending money out of the country; it is only wasted on niggers.' Have we not heard it said? The Master hears it. It is not waste. It is given for love of Him: We love because He first loved, and His love is fragrant, and must be told, like Mary's love, the wide world over.

4. Then there comes stealing in over the threshold—for the door is open now—*the devil of covetousness.* Judas, who had begrudged the presents that were given to Jesus, now begins to covet the gifts that were given to the poor. In one little phrase that comes twice in St John's Gospel we are told that it was Judas' business to buy provisions for the apostolic band, and also to make distribution to those that had need; but, says St John, he did not care for the poor. Why? Because he was a thief. And after that incident of Mary and the precious ointment, when the words of Judas brought a stern rebuke from the lips of Jesus, we are told by St Luke that 'Satan entered into him.' Satan has an opportunity to take possession of the heart every time we turn our back on spiritual privilege. When we despise the love of Jesus, or grudge the gifts to His poor, we are opening a door to the great adversary.

5. Then there came, fifth—*the devil of callousness.* Judas has begun to make arrangements in his own mind, and he has been to the priests. And now, says St John, they sit down at the Supper Table, and the devil has already put it into the heart of Judas to betray Him. But Jesus still fights for the soul of Judas. He gave him the much coveted seat at His own left hand; it was the place of honour which the disciples strove for. But that was not enough; that did not touch the heart of Judas. There was one other thing Jesus could do; and the same thing is done at the table of the Bedouin sheikh to-day. He takes a portion out of the common dish and puts it into the hand of his guest. It is a mark of appreciation and honour. Jesus did that. He took the sop, and gave it to Judas. And Judas took it and went out and betrayed Him, in spite of it. No wonder the Lord said, 'Ye are clean, but not all.' We do not wonder that St John has to record that once again the door opened and 'Satan entered into him.' Satan came in and Judas went out. And it was night.

¶ I would fain see the face of him who, having dipped his hand in the same dish with the Son of Man, could afterwards betray Him. I have no conception of such a thing; nor have I ever seen any picture (not even Leonardo's very fine one) that gave me the least idea of it. [1]

6. Then there came *the devil of treachery.* Judas went to the chief priests and said, 'What will ye give me?' We catch the echo of a voice, and it is St Peter's voice, 'What shall we have?' It is different, yet it is the commercial spirit invading the very sanctuary of religion. 'What will ye give me? Jesus will not give me anything, not even the three hundred pence.' The chief priests say: 'We will give you thirty pieces of silver; that is nearly four pounds; it is not nine pounds, but it is something.' So Judas sells Jesus and buys a field with the money. The devil of treachery does not stop at that. There is a sacred place, lent by the owner of a garden of olive trees, where Jesus has gone to pray, and there he leads his Master's enemies. And that is not all. He kisses his Rabbi on the cheek—a mark of absolute trustworthiness.

Hail! Master mine! so did the viper hiss,
When, with false fang and stealthy crawl, he came
And scorched Messiah's cheek with that vile kiss
He deemed would sojourn there—a brand of shame.

Ah, no! not long! for soon, and face to face
With His world-shouldering Cross Lord Jesu stood.
All hail! He said; and, with a proud embrace,
Fasten'd the traitor's kiss to that forgiving wood! [2]

[1] Charles Lamb, in Hazlitt's *Table Talk.*
[2] Robert Stephen Hawker.

¶ A hundred and eighty miles up the beautiful Hudson River lies Saratoga, a famous summer resort now, but the scene formerly of one of the great triumphs of the American arms in the War of Independence towards the close of the eighteenth century. On the hillside near the town stands a monument, a tall, beautiful obelisk; and, twenty feet up, it has four niches for statues of heroes of the Revolution. Three of the niches are filled; Gates is there, and Schuyler, and Morgan. The fourth niche is purposely left empty. Why? Benedict Arnold ought to have been there—the hero of Quebec, of Saratoga itself, and of other battle-fields, the trusted friend of Washington and idol of the army. But later, under some imagined slight, he turned traitor. The empty niche makes him conspicuous by his absence and pillories his name for ever.[1]

7. The seventh and last devil is *self-murder*. We must understand that Judas had been really killing his better self for a long time; and the rope only finished what he had already begun. The suicide began with the entrance of the first devil; the seventh only finished the work. 'I have sinned'; here is remorse. 'I have betrayed innocent blood.' Yes, but there is no confidence in Christ's love mixed with this confession. Judas was choked by the very devils he had allowed to come in, like the swine possessed by the regiment of demons. The devil is a mean master. He does not even give the bribe he has dangled in front of you all along the way down to perdition.

¶ I was reading a story the other day of a man, a great speculator. He had his portrait painted, and the artist said: 'Do you know I caught the better man that was in him; and I put him on the canvas. And he came to look at it, and turned from it, and looked at me, and said: "That's a fine fellow, but he is far too fine for me. That man could not live in Wall Street." I said to him: "Is there any reason why this man should not be you?" He replied: "If I had lived like that I should be only poor David Cardigan now." And I wondered if he was not poor David Cardigan even now.'[2]

[1] R. Cowan. [2] H. C. Lees, *Failure and Recovery*, 92.

His Own Place

Acts i. 25.—'From which Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place.' (R.V.)

The story of the first vacancy in the Apostolate is a tragedy. One of that little chosen band of twelve turned traitor; he sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver, and then, stricken with torturing remorse, he went out and hanged himself. And after that what became of Judas? Well, this is what Scripture says about the fate of the traitor—he went to his own place.

'That he might go to his own place.' Then there had been a time when Judas occupied a place that was *not* his own? Yes, there had. That was the time when he made one of that chosen band of twelve who companied with Jesus. Judas among the apostles was a man out of place, and Jesus, at any rate, knew it. Very likely the eleven thought Judas had as much right to be there as any one of them. They were deceived by his specious exterior, and could not read his treacherous heart. But Jesus knew what was in man. He had read this false disciple of His through and through. 'Have I not chosen you,' He said one day, 'and one of you hath a devil?' Amongst the faithful there was one faithless; amongst the men whom Jesus called to be His friends, there was one ready to sell Him for a few paltry pieces of silver. For two years at least Judas had occupied a place that was not his own.

But deception cannot last for ever. It ends at death. Then the reign of reality begins. Then every man appears what he is, and occupies the place he deserves. Judas hanged himself, and then he went—not to heaven, to be with the Master he had so cruelly betrayed; nor does the Scripture say, to hell—he went to his own place, the place he was fit for; the place his own life had prepared for him.

In these words we have the principle of the Divine judgment. This is what happens at the judgment—every man finds his own place; every man joins the company he loves.

1. *Reversals of Human Judgment.*—The Divine judgment is often a reversal of the human judgment. Our Lord Himself has said that there are first who shall be last, and there are last who shall be first. We read in the papers

about appeals from a lower court to a higher, and sometimes it happens that the decision of the higher court reverses that of the lower. So in the case of men there is an appeal from the judgment of the world to the infallible judgment of God. And oftentimes God's judgment is a complete reversal of the human judgment. The reason of this is, that every man *here* is *not* in his own place. Men are deceived by appearances, and place men in positions for which they are not fit. But all that will come to an end when we stand before the bar of God. The real man will then be revealed, and he will go to his own place—the place he really deserves; he will go to live with those to whom he is truly akin.

In every walk of life, in every trade, in every profession, there are some very obvious 'misfits.' There are men 'out of place,' 'misfits,' in every workshop in the country; there are 'misfits' behind the counter, in the lawyer's office, at the bar, in the pulpit. Some men are too big for their places, and some are too little. We see ability neglected, we see incompetence enthroned. We settle things in a very rough-and-tumble kind of way. The teaching of events enables us to correct our most glaring mistakes, and the occasion sometimes produces the man. But blunders we shall continue to make to the end of the chapter, for the simple reason that we are men. We are bound to judge by outward appearances, and appearances are often deceptive. Our judgments are never perfect.

The same truth holds *in the moral and spiritual sphere.* Here, again, we are compelled to judge by appearances, and hence are always liable to be deceived. We give to a man a reputation for piety and goodness which he does not really deserve. He has deceived us by a specious exterior. The people thought Judas was a devoted disciple whereas in the company of Jesus he was 'out of place.'

The old proverb which says that a man is known by the company he keeps, is half truth, half falsehood. It may be a deliberate device to keep the real man hidden. We are reminded from time to time that men make a cloak of religion in order to be the better able to cheat and swindle and fleece their fellows. It does not necessarily follow that a man is good because he frequents the company of good men, or that he is religious because he frequents religious services and sits down at the Lord's Table. There are still men who are constant attendants upon religious worship who in their hearts have enthroned not Christ but the world, who, while observing the form of godliness, utterly deny the power thereof. The age of make-believe is not yet at an end.

¶ 'Among the very curious grown-up people into whose company I was thrown,' says Edmund Gosse, 'although many were frail and some were foolish, none, so far as I can discern, were hypocritical. I am not one of those who believe that hypocrisy is a vice that grows on every bush.' 'But,' he goes on, 'I had the advantage of knowing a person who was branded before the whole world, and punished by the law of his country, as a felonious hypocrite. My father himself could only sigh and admit the charge. . . . About half-way between our village and the town there lay a comfortable villa inhabited by a retired solicitor, whom I shall name Mr Dormant. We often called at his half-way house, and, although he was a member of the town-meeting, he not unfrequently came up to us for "the breaking of bread." He was extremely fluent and zealous in using the pious phraseology of the sect. My father had never been very much attracted to him, but the man professed, and I think felt, an overwhelming admiration for my father. Mr Dormant was not very well off, and in the previous year he had persuaded an aged gentleman of wealth to come and board with them. When, in the course of the winter, this gentleman died, much surprise was felt at the report that he had left almost his entire fortune, which was not inconsiderable, to Mr Dormant.

'Much surprise—for the old gentleman had a son to whom he had always been warmly attached, who was far away, I think in South America, practising a perfectly respectable profession of which his father entirely approved. Now Mr Dormant came into his fortune, and began to make handsome gifts to missionary societies, and to his own meeting in the town. He gave, unsolicited, a sum to our building fund, which my father afterwards returned. But in process of time we heard that the son had come back from the Antipodes, and was making investigations. Before we knew where we were, the news burst upon us, like a bomb-shell, that Mr Dormant had been arrested

on a criminal charge and was now in gaol at Exeter.

'Sympathy was at first much extended amongst us to the prisoner. But it was lessened when we understood that the old gentleman had been "converted" while under Dormant's roof, and had given the fact that his son was "an unbeliever" as a reason for disinheriting him. All doubt was set aside when it was divulged, under pressure, by the nurse who attended on the old gentleman, herself one of the "saints," that Dormant had traced the signature to the will by drawing the fingers of the testator over the document when he was already and finally comatose.

'Dormant could be induced to exhibit no species of remorse, and, to the obvious anger of the judge himself, stated that he had only done his duty as a Christian, in preventing this wealth from coming into the hands of an ungodly man, who would have spent it in the service of the flesh and of the devil.' [1]

But a reputation for piety and sanctity, if undeserved, will only avail for the few years of this mortal life. If the piety is skin deep, if the goodness is not of the heart, the mistake will be rectified. In the white light that streams from the throne, deception and make-believe are no longer possible. Man will go to the place he is really fit for. He will make his abode with the things he really loves.

2. *The Judgment not Arbitrary.*—We are apt to cherish crude and unworthy ideas of what the last judgment is. We have taken our ideas of it from an earthly court of justice. We have pictured God as the judge pronouncing judgment upon us. The text, however, gives us another, and a truer, idea of the judgment. It is not God who decides our sentence; we decide our own. 'We are ourselves both judge and jury and prisoner at the bar.' This is the judgment—letting the heart tell out its secrets, letting the real man be seen; this is the doom—sending a man to his own place, to live with those things which in his heart he has cherished. Who is it that decides what a man's place shall be? Not God! We ourselves decide that. The heart will declare what things we loved and cherished here on earth, and *there*—among those things—will be our place. It is our own hearts that either justify or condemn us.

[1] Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son*, 233.

¶ Slowly and painlessly consciousness returned. He looked about him and remembered. It seemed but a moment, and yet the life he had lived on earth was as far from him as if he had died a century ago. In the stillness and the measureless quiet which enfolded him after those last agonizing hours he knew that he had already entered into rest. So deep was the peace which fell softly as if from the vast heights above him that he felt no curiosity and was without fear. He was in a new life and he must find his place in it, but he was content to wait; and while he waited his thought went swiftly back to the days when, a little child, he looked up at the sky and wondered if the stars were the lights in the streets of heaven. One by one the years rose out of the depths of his memory and he recalled, step by step, all the way he had come: childhood, youth, manhood, and age. He read with deepening interest the story of his life—all his thoughts, his words, the things he had done and left undone. And as he read he knew what was good and what was ill; everything was clear, not only in the unbroken record of what he had been, but in a sudden perception of what he was. At last he knew himself. And while he pondered one stood beside him, grave and calm and sweet with the purity that is perfect strength. Into the face which turned toward him, touched with the light of immortal joy, he looked up and asked, 'When shall I be judged?'

And the answer came: 'You have judged yourself. You may go where you will.' [1]

Look at that little phrase, 'his own place.' It belonged to him so to speak. He possessed it and had carried it about with him for years. Whatever our destiny may be, we carry it about with us; we bear it in our hearts before we actually enter upon it. And here comes in the vital importance of daily acts of our life. There is nothing magical, or capricious, or arbitrary about the judgment. The place we shall occupy after death will be *our own*, the place that we have made for ourselves. Every day and every moment of the day, as we buy and sell, build and plant, write and speak, we are making our own destinies—building our own place. Our eternal home when we reach it will be—shall we say?—a familiar place.

¶ I remember reading about an eminent minister's first impressions of a visit to Rome.

[1] H. W. Mabie, *Parables of Life*, 27.

And this was the deepest impression—an impression of familiarity with the city of the Seven Hills. He had read so much about Rome, he had been in imagination there so often, that when he actually stood on the Forum and the Palatine Hill, he felt himself no stranger. And that is how a man feels with his eternal home. He is no stranger to it.[1]

His own place, and *his own people.* Every man goes to live with those to whom he is spiritually akin. He finds the society for which he is fit. Place a man in a society to which he is unaccustomed, and he is uncomfortable in it. A collier would be unhappy in a West End drawing-room, and so a sinner would be unhappy in heaven. There would be no one there with whom he could converse. He could have no pleasure in the company of the saints, while the vision of Christ would fill his very soul with terror. But those who delight in the saints, who meditate on God's law, who rejoice to do Christ's will—these shall come at last to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn written in heaven, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Christ the judge of all. Every man shall go to his own place, and shall join his own people.

Matthias

Acts i. 26.—'And the lot fell upon Matthias.'

THE first recorded act of the apostles after our Lord's Ascension was to fill the vacant place in the number of the Twelve caused by the suicide of Judas, the traitor. They laid down the qualifications which were necessary for the post. He must be one who had companied with them all the time from the baptism of John to the Ascension of our Lord, and one who would be with them a witness of the Resurrection. They selected two out of the limited number of people who could satisfy these conditions. They prayed for God's guidance, they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias.

1. There are two questions here which we might prefer to avoid but which we ought to face.

(1) The first concerns the method adopted by the early Church in this election. The use of lots was an Old Testament expedient, and was in vogue amongst the nations of antiquity generally. It was governed by the presupposition that Divine influence controlled the operation, and that the result coincided infallibly with the Divine Will. After this occasion, we never hear of its being resorted to again in New Testament times. We should frankly recognize that the method was far from satisfactory, and represented a stage in the development of ethical ideas. The fact that the process was accompanied with prayer proves at any rate the good faith of those who carried it out. But we know that many matters, the moral character of which the enlightened conscience of mankind has since perceived to be wrong, have been made the subject of earnest prayer in the past. Nor can we claim to be exempt in our own day from such contradictory experiences, as devising unworthy schemes and asking God's blessing on them. There are people in whom the habit of seeking the Divine benediction on their actions seems to be more highly developed than the habit of searching their own hearts and consciences. That is true, indeed, more or less in the case of all of us. But to return to the question of casting lots, here is what Dr Joseph Parker says about it in this very context. 'If,' he says, 'you were to write all the creeds of Christendom, and put them into an urn, and to shake the urn after prayer, asking God that the right creed might come out, I should not wonder that some creed should fall out of the urn, that would shock the sense of nine-tenths of Christendom. There is no such way,' he concludes, 'of discovering God's thought.' In a perplexing situation we must depend on the interpretation which circumstances conspire to yield, on the advice of wise friends, and ultimately on our own judgment, purified and instructed by communion with God.

(2) The second question raised by this passage of Scripture refers, not to the worthiness of the method of election, but to the propriety of an election having been made at all. There are many devout students of the Bible who regard it as having been premature and unwarranted, the outcome of Simon Peter's impetuosity. The apostles, they maintain, ought to have waited, as they were told to do, for the promise of the Holy Spirit. It need hardly be said that those who hold such a view of what took

[1] J. D. Jones.

place as that are entitled to their opinions. It is quite in accordance with the profoundest reverence for Scripture. Because, while believing in the doctrine of the Divine inspiration of the Bible, we are not obliged on that account to defend all the actions of the apostles. At the same time, most people, no doubt, will agree with the writer who observes that 'the step taken in setting about the election of a twelfth apostle was a legitimate exercise of human wisdom in dependence upon Divine guidance. Luke, the beloved friend of St Paul, appears to endorse the election, for, after speaking of the eleven apostles in the first chapter, he later on in the Book refers to the twelve.'

2. We know for certain nothing more about Matthias than is recorded in this passage by St Luke. One tradition says that he laboured amongst a cannibal tribe in Africa, and came near to losing his life at their hands. Another makes Jerusalem the scene of his ministry, and the place of his burial. His career is wrapped in obscurity. Our only authentic glimpse of the man is on the day of his appointment in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. In what kind of a position did he find himself on that occasion? We have material enough to give a fairly complete answer.

(1) Matthias found himself *the successful candidate.* How did he take his success? He can hardly have been human if he was not tempted to cherish a feeling of elation over his companion, Barsabbas. Did he resist the impulse, and bear himself meekly? Thomas Boston tells us that the night before his ordination at Simprin he remembered how Satan was sure to lie in wait for him in a special manner on the eve of such a great occasion. Next morning he records that Satan got advantage of him indeed. 'But,' he goes on, 'that word was given me for support, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." I came to Simprin leaning on the foresaid word.' And shall we not believe that as was the day of Matthias, so also was his strength?

(2) Matthias found himself *the successor of Judas Iscariot.* The vacancy had arisen in a tragic way. The mantle that descended on the shoulders of Matthias had been worn by the betrayer. Would not the heart of the newly elected apostle be swept by an emotion of fear and trembling? He knew that it would never befall him amid the olive trees beyond the Kedron to kiss the Saviour into the hands of His enemies. His hand would never be able to close over thirty pieces of silver as a sufficient price for bringing the Master to shame and the Cross. But Matthias knew, as we know, that it was still possible for a man, yes, even for an apostle, to betray the Son of God in thought and in word, and to crucify Him afresh by behaviour that put Him to shame.

When our every deed and word and thought
Should our fealty proclaim,
Full oft we bring His name to nought
And cover Him with shame.

Not alone did Judas his Master sell,
Nor Peter his Lord deny,
Each one who doth His love repel,
Or at His guidance doth rebel,
Doth the Lord Christ crucify.[1]

'Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.' That was the message that was delivered to the Christians in Philadelphia. It was not so much a motive that was appealed to, as a certain spirit that was bespoken. Not because someone else was waiting to take possession of their crown, should they forfeit it by unfaithfulness; not because there was a rival candidate, whose claims came next in order to theirs, were they required 'to hold fast that which they had.' The zeal they were exhorted to manifest, the temper they were urged to exhibit, was to be distinguished by that degree of resoluteness, which naturally characterized the man who was tenacious of his rights, and jealous lest another should by any chance fall heir to them. As if someone else were at hand to snatch up what they despised and cast from them, not because someone else actually was at hand, it behoved the Philadelphians 'to hold fast that which they had.'

And similarly, not because the position we occupy and the profession we make have been betrayed by a Judas, but conscious that they may be betrayed, remembering that they constitute an opportunity which may be magnified or utterly destroyed, we ought to take heed lest we fall. Our hope of standing fast must

[1] J. Oxenham.

be based on the assurance of the apostle Paul: 'Thy grace, O Christ, is sufficient for me, and thy strength is made perfect in my weakness.'

(3) Matthias found himself *an apostle of Jesus Christ*. It was an office of great honour and privilege. His name was destined to come down to posterity in a goodly fellowship. Utterly unjust, surely, would be any account of the emotions which worked within him, if, besides the tempting whisperings of self-congratulation, and the salutary feeling of self-distrust, we failed to record the deep-seated solemn joy that he was no longer Matthias, but Matthias an apostle of Jesus Christ. The throne of Cæsar did not carry greater responsibilities: but neither did it cover its occupant with greater glory than the ministry to which Matthias was ordained. For the mighty empire of Rome was destined to flourish for a season and then decay; but the Kingdom of Christ, in the establishment of which Matthias was called to bear a pioneer's part, was to expand throughout the whole earth and endure for ever and ever. We are called to be witnesses of Christ to our generation. Who amongst us needs to be urged to embrace such a high privilege, and to undertake such a glorious office?

The Holy Spirit

Acts ii. 2, 3.—'And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind . . . . And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.'

THERE is only one definition of God which comes to us from the lips of Christ Himself, and that is, 'God is spirit.' St John gives us two others which we know would have Christ's sanction—'God is light' and 'God is love.' But the words, 'God is spirit' are the words of our Saviour Himself.

What do we mean by spirit? The word, of course, properly means air in motion, breath. The spirit in the Old Testament is always the principle of life. God renews the face of the earth by sending His spirit into His creatures, and when He taketh away their spirit they die. Then the dust returns to the earth as it was, but the spirit returns to God who gave it. But some of God's creatures have more life than others. There are some chosen persons on whom the Spirit of the Lord comes mightily, tempestuously, carrying them out of themselves and turning them into prophets. Prophets were not very common, but Moses said, 'Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets'; and Joel predicts that some day this would come to pass. 'I will pour out my spirit, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.' Spirit, then, is life at its highest, fullness of life. The spiritual man is one whom God has made intensely alive with His own life, raising every faculty to a higher activity, so that he sees the true meaning of experience and feels the deep currents of life, while others see only the ripples upon the surface and are driven to and fro by the light breezes that ruffle the topmost waters.

¶ Dante knew he was rising to a higher heaven by the richer smile on Beatrice's face; so, too, progress toward union with God is to be known by the increased enrichment of all the powers of our personality.[1]

In the first three Gospels the language about the Spirit is like that of the Old Testament. Jesus Christ, like John the Baptist, was filled with the Spirit from His mother's womb. At His baptism there was a new descent of Divine power upon Him. The Spirit drove Him into the wilderness to be tempted. The Spirit was upon Him when He preached the glad tidings at Nazareth. By the Spirit of God He cast out devils. Lastly, those who blaspheme against the Holy Ghost—that is to say, those who, when God's own pure light shines straight in their faces, revile it and curse it and hate it—have never forgiveness but are in danger of eternal sin. This is really all we hear about the Spirit in St Matthew, St Mark, and St Luke.

When we turn to the earlier records of the infant Church, in St Paul's Epistles and the Acts, what do we find about the Spirit there? We find some rather strange things. If we could have dropped in at one of St Paul's services at Corinth, especially when the Apostle himself was not there, we should have been rather scandalized. We do not know exactly what speaking with tongues was, but it is plain that the speaker was in an ecstatic condition which might have been mistaken for intoxication. In the next century the Church discouraged speaking with tongues, thereby returning to the calm and unexciting manner of our Lord's own teaching.

[1] E. H. Griggs.

The parallel between this bit of history and the passage in 1 Kings is rather remarkable. The wind and the earthquake and the fire came first, and after the fire a still small voice, and the Lord was in the still small voice, and not in the commotion of the elements. So in Acts we read of the place being shaken where the disciples were assembled, and of the rushing mighty wind, and the tongues of fire about the heads of the Apostles. But the real presence of the Spirit was in the hearts of the disciples. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, not speaking with tongues and prophesying.

1. First, we need not trouble ourselves about the separate personality of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament draws no clear distinction between the operations of God, of Christ, of the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of God, and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God Himself in action—always in action. The spiritual light is not the white radiance of eternity that never changes, but a light that comes into the world and burns and shines more and more unto the perfect day. It is the light of life. So the truth in the Gospels is not a body of dogma; it is the power that makes us free. And the life in the Gospels is not the deferred reward of goodness but an inexhaustible spring of Divine energy. So the Spirit is a power rather than a substance. The spiritual life is no changeless vision of beauty, truth, and goodness; it is a life of will and energy, an unending upward movement of faith that demands ever new ventures, a knowledge that dares never cease to learn. The Holy Spirit is the power of God working invisibly in the hearts of men.

2. Secondly, let us consider how the Spirit completes the work of Christ. In religious history two great cries for help meet us throughout in infinitely varied terms. One is the cry for forgiveness, for the wiping-out of the dreadful and unknown depth of sin, for the healing of the wounds which conscience causes to smart continually. This cry has been answered. One has come to us from the throne of Godhead saying to the most hopeless of sinners, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee.'

But there is another human cry, the cry for goodness. We want not only to have the burden taken off our backs, we want to be changed, our very own selves. 'Make me a clean heart, O God,' says the psalmist, 'and renew a right spirit within me. Let thy loving Spirit lead me forth into the land of righteousness.' We long for goodness as much as we long for pardon. Until Christ came and sent us the Holy Spirit it seemed out of our reach.

Now after the first Whit-Sunday men felt that the cry for goodness had been answered. A new life had come into the world, showing itself in charity, in compassion, and in strong ambition to spend and be spent for God. The Spirit was among them and within them. They felt it in themselves, they saw it in each other. It was not only a great idea, such as has often transfigured the characters of men; it was a real power from the unseen world. It was something as wonderful as the sense of pardon by the blood of Christ—indeed, more wonderful, for that was something done for men, this was something done in them. They were not the same men that they were before. They themselves and the world around them were changed. 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation,' so they put it. They felt themselves new and better men in a new and better world.

¶ 'To make things new,' says George Matheson, 'is not the same as to make new things. To make new things is the work of the hand; to make things new is the work of the heart. Whenever one sits upon the throne of the heart, all things are made new. They are made so without changing a line, without altering a feature. Enthrone in your heart an object of love, and you have renewed the universe. You have given an added note to every bird, a fresh joy to every brook, a fairer tint to every flower.'

Heaven above is softer blue,
  Earth around is sweeter green;
Something lives in every hue,
  Christless eyes have never seen.
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,
  Flowers with brighter beauties shine,
Since I knew, as now I know,
  I am His and He is mine.

¶ On one occasion a poor fisherman, who had taken me across a bay to see a dying man, apologized when at last I got to his house cold and wet, because the hot tea that he offered me had neither sugar nor milk. There were

several children in the room partly grown up, and miserably clad. In the attic I found an old fisherman dying of cancer of the throat, and his old wife, blind with cataract, crooning from her broken heart over the partner of her life. After doing what I could I came down the ladder that served for the stairs and asked my friend whether this was his father. 'Only a neighbour,' he replied. 'How long has he been in your house,' I asked. He replied that the man had been there about a year. I said: 'Do they pay anything for their food?' 'They have nothing to pay.' I then asked him: 'Why do you do it, seeing that you and your children are so much in need.' The man looked into my face and said the same thing: 'What would *you* do, doctor?'[1]

That indwelling, transforming power is still with us, visiting us and blessing us in the loneliness of our private thoughts, and in those corporate acts of worship in which the Church dispenses to its members heavenly gifts. On these occasions the Holy Ghost is indeed given. His presence is unseen. What would we have? Can earthquakes and rumblings and tongues of fire tell us anything about God? It is unseen but very real.

Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But, while this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close us in, we cannot hear it.

No, but we can hear it if we will only believe, and if we will be careful to do nothing, and say nothing, and think nothing which must grieve or even quench that sacred presence. He will teach if we will learn, He will enter if we do not shut Him out.

The Meaning of Pentecost

Acts ii. 2-4.—'And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind. . . . And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.'

This is one of the most amazing stories in the world. There is none which should be more interesting to Christian people, for it is the story of the launch of the Christian Church. It is the story of how the Church which had been slowly shaping in the quietness and obscurity of that Upper Room became conscious of life and power and set out upon its mission. So far these men and women have been rather ordinary people, their love for Jesus Christ the one thing keeping them together. They were perplexed, terribly timid, and very conscious of their weakness. Then, as they waited, all on a sudden as it seemed, something happened which changed their personalities. They became conscious of a unity which broke down every other barrier. They found themselves in possession of faculties they had never dreamed could be theirs. They lost all fear of people and all thought of themselves. They were fired with a message, and a passion to tell people about it, to spread the good news of a love which had flooded their lives and carried them off their feet.

¶ All ages are aglow with this fruit of the Spirit. 'Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man,' was the cry of a Christian to the aged saint in the day of his trial. 'Eighty-six years have I served Christ,' answered Polycarp to his judge, 'and He has never wronged me, how can I now speak evil of my King and Saviour?' And so he died. Our hearts still thrill as we read the words of Ignatius on his way to his martyrdom: 'Come fire and cross; come crowds of wild beasts; come tearings and manglings; wracking of bones and hacking of limbs; come cruel tortures of the devil, only let me attain to Jesus Christ.' It has ever been the same. The conquests of Christianity have ever been through men to whom Jesus Christ has appealed on the side of their strength, and whose hearts His Spirit has fired with high resolve. The Christian army is not an ambulance corps but a storming battalion.[1]

As we read the story so many centuries away, there is a question we inevitably ask: What really happened at Pentecost? The New Testament people spoke continually of a Holy Spirit. They must have meant something by it. For they were not romancing in the realms of theology for a pastime. They were people who had made a great discovery. They had had a real experience and they were trying to write it down so that others should know about it; much as a man fighting his way through a desert, who has found a secret spring on which

[1] W. T. Grenfell.

[1] N. Maclean and J. R. P. Sclater, *God and the Soldier*, 102.

his very life was nourished, writes down the information, lest in the drift of things the spring should get choked and buried, and for want of it, those who are to carry on his battle and take his place should fall back or perish by the way. What did they mean by the Holy Spirit?

1. In the first place, they meant by it *God's power of immediate contact with our life.* That was the great thing which the Spirit signified for them. They realized that God was in contact with them, was within their very souls. They did not need any kind of outside help. They could go out and face the world and be confident that God would back them up; that somehow His very Spirit was in living touch with theirs, deep down in the place where the mind did its thinking, and the heart its loving, and courage and hope had their secret spring. Within them there was a fountain from which sprang up everything that was good. And *now* they knew that this fountain ran right down into the being of God, and that somehow He was there within them by His Spirit, active and loving and gracious, able to make new men of them, able to revive their courage and faith so that they could face anything. That was what the Spirit meant to them. It was one of the greatest discoveries of life. It was like the discovery which Paton made to the natives of the New Hebrides. They wanted water, for the season had been dry and all the streams were useless. Paton began to dig down into the earth. They protested, saying that water always came from above. But he persisted and presently clear water began to rise at the bottom of the well and they discovered that within their own island they were in touch with the springs.

What a new power it would give us to realize this—that God is within. What a new vitality it would bring to prayer to realize that He does not stand without us but already manifests Himself in our hearts in the very urge that sends us to our knees. What new strength it would add to every demand of duty or faith, what new meanings to those high thoughts that visit us from time to time and lift our life for the moment to new heights of hope and aspiration, to know that in them and in obedience to them, we are meeting with and yielding to the inexhaustible energy of the Spirit of God.

¶ In the stillness of his soul George Fox heard Christ speaking to him so clearly that he could not mistake it. 'I heard a voice,' he wrote in his *Journal*, 'which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus that can speak to thy condition," and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.' He felt now that he knew Christ in the same way that one knows a human friend. He had met Him; he had found Him. It was an experience and not a guess. The Holy Grail, then, was to be found within, and not in a distant country. It was as though he now had a pass key, a master key, which would open any door where he wanted to enter. He had discovered something better than men, better than priests, better than books—the living Christ who could speak and teach and live in his own heart, just as the light and heat and power of the distant sun can be present here on the earth, where we need light and heat and power.[1]

I believe in Thee!
Life's Lord, Life's Giver,
For aye and ever
Source and Fountain of boundless sanctity,
Pouring high sapience and wisdom royally
Down on Thy suppliant people, the blest, the free.
Thou who art fain to hallow all men, oh, hallow me,
My God, I believe in Thee.[2]

2. A second thing which the Spirit meant for them was the experience that *the Christian life has its roots in an original impulse.* It is a living thing which works from the heart—not a mere mechanical copy of a pattern on which we artificially mould our lives. We often speak of Christianity as a way of life, and so it is. It is a way of doing things, a certain code of practices, a style of high living and true thinking. It becomes, by and by, a certain type of character which we learn to call Christian. But how is that character produced? Is it produced merely by a painful and accurate copying of Jesus, sitting down before His portrait as an artist sits down before a picture, and slowly modelling our lives on it line by line and act after act? Or is it produced by getting together a set of rules and regulations

[1] Rufus M. Jones, *The Story of George Fox*, 15.
[2] E. Hickey, *An Act of Faith.*

out of the New Testament and systematically obeying them? That is how we often think of the Christian life; and that is why it is often such a dreary and unattractive business, and, even with all our efforts, so utterly hopeless.

But that was not how the people of the New Testament thought of the Christian life or experienced it. What they found was that through Him they possessed a root of life, a spirit alive in their souls, growing up in them, shaping character from within and finding its outlet in a certain way of life and service and in all their attitudes to one another. They found that they could think with His mind and were not slavishly dependent upon His words. The life was in them as an original impulse, breaking out in them in a way of feeling and thinking and doing, as the life in a tree breaks out in blossom and fruit when the Spring sap stirs in its veins. And so character was a fruit, and service was a fruit, and all that was good in their lives was a fruit of the Spirit, which had somehow grown and been awakened to life in them through Him.

Now this is the original thing in Christianity. There are people who are fond of telling us that there is teaching in other masters and other faiths which is as noble as that in the Gospels. As Whittier says:

> The white wings of the Holy Ghost
> Stoop, seen or unseen, o'er the heads of all.

But the original thing in Christianity is the power it has to create Christian personalities, to make men think like Jesus, and grow like Jesus, not from the practice of a rigid obedience but from the power of an inward life. Jesus laid down no rules—He communicates a Spirit. And the measure in which we have that Spirit is the measure of the spontaneity and freedom and reality of our Christian life.

3. Yet again, their thought of the Spirit was *the guarantee of progress*, of new things, of the changed world, of the living and victorious Church. Christianity does not rest upon a tradition; it lives in a vital experience, an experience which is ever renewing itself. That power of infinite renewal is what the gift of the Spirit means.

(1) It means, for instance, the discovery and the unfolding of new truth. Jesus said as much. There were things He could not tell His disciples, but the Spirit would lead them into the secret. The Spirit is the living mind of God at work in the minds of men, unfolding and enlarging their thoughts, awakening new ideas, revealing new truth. There are secrets we do not know at present, but who is to say that one day even here on earth men will not discover them? We know little about the origin of evil; but why should we not discover it one day as men hope one day to find out the origin of cancer? There are things about God we do not know. The nature of God is largely veiled, though not so veiled as Mr Wells and others have pictured it. But who is to set limits to the things which shall be revealed by the Spirit?

¶ 'The Christian,' says Herrmann, 'has constantly the consciousness of being on the threshold of fresh knowledge of God.'

¶ The fact that a revelation is progressive is no argument that it is not Divine; it is, in fact, only when the free current of the religious life is dammed up that it turns into a swamp, and poisons human society.

Of course, we must be ready to admit with all humility that *our* notions of God are probably unworthy and distorted enough; but that is no reason why we should not follow the light that we have, or mistrust it on the ground that it is 'too *good* to be true.' [1]

(2) The gift of the Spirit means new guidance, for the new circumstances we may have to face. There are people who take the view that because Christ did not say anything definite about certain problems which confront us to-day, about war for instance, or industry, or poverty, or the housing question, they may safely be kept outside the range of the living conscience. But surely this is to deny the whole New Testament doctrine of the Spirit. The Spirit is a living Spirit. His guidance develops with need. He fits His word for conscience to the circumstances. 'The messages of God,' says Mark Rutherford, 'cannot be read through the envelope in which they are enclosed.' But when life and its needs tear open the envelope the message of God is there.

(3) And there is, in the promise of the Spirit, the hope of infinite renewal. The day of revival is not over. Pentecost is only its beginning. For the Spirit is God's infinite power of access

[1] W. R. Inge.

to the hearts of men and the possibility of the constant reviving of faith and religion. The Spirit that made Pentecost, and gave the truth fire, and the message wings, and brought thousands of people to their knees calling Jesus 'Lord'—that Spirit lives and His work is going on till the Kingdom is brought in.

¶ We have, perhaps, an exaggerated idea of the men inspired at Pentecost. Unconsciously we have thought that they belonged to some different order of beings to those of the present day. Such ideas are artificial, but habits of thought are easy to acquire and we adopt them without challenge. It has so long been the custom to speak of Pentecost as past that when its wonders are taking place under our very eyes we question it because it has not come in the way we were led to expect. We have magnified the first messengers of the gospel beyond all human likeness, and it needs a revolution of our ideas to take in the fact that *these* are the days of Pentecost, that the men by whom the world is being evangelized, with whose faces and voices we are familiar, are the very descendants and followers of the apostolic preachers.[1]

By whatever name we call it, we cannot do without this doctrine of the Spirit. And we certainly cannot do without this experience. How does it come? 'Go and wait,' said Jesus, giving them directions. 'Go and think about Me'; that is the secret. It is when we think about Christ, when we get into His presence, so to speak, and are waiting and willing to be led and taught and guided and helped, and in that attitude face life, that the Spirit comes. The gift of the Spirit does not mean the domination of our will. A man is never so active with his will, his mind, his struggle and effort, as when the Spirit is finding a centre in his heart—when he realizes, as did Paul, it is 'I, yet not I.' And this attitude, quietly receptive and passionately eager, is the deep secret of the Christian life and the Christian victory.

The Spirit's Intelligibility

Acts ii. 8.—'And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?'

THE story told in the beginning of this chapter is that of the birth of the Christian Church, and a very wonderful story it is. Up till this time we may suppose there had only existed individual followers of Christ—one or two here, one or two there. But, as they were gathered together on the day of Pentecost in one place, the Spirit of God descended upon them; they were fused, as by fire, into a unity, and in that hour the Church of Christ was born.

Think of the first Whit-Sunday, and that rushing, mighty wind, when the heavens visited the earth and blessed them with an eternal blessing, that highest of all the great tides of the Spirit, bearing onward the thought and life of men and generations towards those goals by which and towards which men live. But this redemptive sweep of the Spirit was not independent of the men to whom it came. It was nothing arbitrary that might have equally well come and done its work whoever was waiting for it and however they were waiting. It required its human counterpart. It did this and always does, and we must remember the human element in all this. The spirit of man must be charged with answering element to receive the Spirit of God. Tense, exalted, expectant, waiting for the Holy Ghost, men received Him in that mighty power.

1. Here is a Spirit-filled Church, and this is the impression which was left upon its first audience—that the message of that Church was for each of them, and in his own tongue. It was a message to be understood.

They talked to every man in his own language, and every man found them intelligible. And there were four great groups of nations—the far East of the Parthians and Elamites, the nearer East of the islands of the sea and Asia Minor and Palestine, Egypt, and the Roman Empire. And these four were utterly different in origin and in character. Not only did they speak different languages, but they lived upon different traditions, different habits of mind, that utterly differentiated them one from another. The Oriental was mystic, and dealt deeply in the occult. The Greek was philosophic. Egypt was ancient, solemn, dwelling among the dead and finding great solemnity for the living there. The Roman was intensely alive and practical. And the point of the whole story is this, that when the Spirit came men were intelligible to all these far-reaching and different varieties.

[1] Mrs Edward Trotter, *Lord Radstock*, 244.

This is the fundamental and obvious thing to strike the imagination. It is not merely a linguistic phenomenon that it records, it is an intelligible gospel to men of infinite varieties of mind and culture, to men of different ideas and points of view. So intelligible was the gospel that it had the most violent practical results, that it set going the most vital forces that have ever been set going on earth.

Now, how different this from what the mind of man thinks and feels and hears about the Holy Spirit! The very mention of His name is associated by some with the wild, the extravagant, and the abnormal, the strangest varieties of religious experience. The popular idea of the Spirit is precisely the opposite of intelligibility. It is that something unintelligible is happening. Long ago St Paul had to combat that, when he advocated prophecy that was understood against tongues which no man could make anything of, and told us that the fruits of the Spirit were the simple things—love and joy and peace. When Jesus Christ Himself came and promised the Divine Spirit it was the Spirit of truth He promised them that would lead them into true thinking. To set free on earth, not only ecstatic feeling, but knowledge and insight—that was to be His work.

Here, then, is the great gift of the Holy Ghost, the original and authentic note of which is not something occult at all, not something that everybody is amazed at, but something intelligible, and that everybody understands. The Holy Spirit is just God making men understand Him, God speaking to each kind of man in His own tongue.

¶ In *Lavengro* Borrow describes the almost magical effect that followed the utterance of certain sounds by a rough Irish smith when speaking to a horse. 'He uttered a word which I had never heard before, in a sharp, pungent tone. The effect upon myself was somewhat extraordinary, a strange thrill ran through me; but with regard to the cob it was terrible; the animal forthwith became like one mad, and reared and kicked with the utmost desperation.' Then the smith 'uttered another word in a voice singularly modified, but sweet and almost plaintive; the effect of it was as instantaneous as the other, but how different!—the animal lost all its fury and became at once calm and gentle.' If such effects can follow the addressing even of a dumb animal 'in its own language,' how much more swift and telling would be the effect of allowing the Spirit to move men through a medium they could understand and to which they could respond![1]

2. Now the great secret of intelligibility is experience. The one thing a man thoroughly understands is what he has been through, to put it in common phrase. That is the only thing he knows at first hand. The greatest danger in the world both for character and for the effect of one's life upon others, is that of living outside one's experience; dallying with the imagined life, more poetic or more religious or more beautiful in many ways than the life that one is leading, trying to occupy one's mind with pretended excellences that are not really our own, outside the range of our vital, actual experience.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is reality. The most spiritual Church is the one that has the most intelligible and clearest and realest message. What is the test of reality? Is it not just what fits into the frame of our own experience? A speech in a foreign tongue, for instance, is not real; it conveys nothing to us. A speech about things we have no experience of is not real. Now when God baptized His Church at Pentecost each man felt and declared that the truths presented were designed expressly for him.

At Pentecost every man and woman knew that here was something sent by heaven for *them*. Somehow, through the power of God, they were listening to familiar accents. The message was for *them*; they understood it. Avenues were opened, ways were cleared, entrances were instantly discovered to hearts which before Pentecost were sealed. In the letters of St Paul, we read about another gift of tongues, but that was different from this of Pentecost. *That* was impassioned and ecstatic utterance which was unintelligible save for an interpreter; *this* was speaking to be understood. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit Himself was the interpreter. He gathered an audience out of every country to typify the universal heart. And then He so inspired those earliest witnesses that everybody who heard them understood, and felt that the message was for them.

We do not suppose that in its literal form that miracle will ever be repeated. We never

[1] Hubert L. Simpson.

heard of any foreign missionary receiving by sudden gift a foreign language. Yet we know that whenever to the Church there comes a time of Pentecostal blessing, this evidence is manifestly present. Take an inspired preacher. What an infinitely varied audience he has drawn from every section of society. The rich and poor, the gentleman and the beggar, the saint and the poor wastrel from the street—and yet everybody hears in his own tongue. Filled with the Holy Ghost he speaks his message, and God in His infinite wisdom does the rest, touching the message with some familiar chords for lives that were as separate as the poles. And whenever there comes to the Church a time of Pentecost one seal of its appointed ministry is that everybody hears in his own tongue. Men do not say 'I cannot understand. The preacher's tongue is alien from mine.' The witness-bearing breaks through every barrier, and deep begins calling unto deep. Clothed with grace, the universal gospel is spoken in a universal language: not by might nor by power, but by *My Spirit*, saith the Lord.

Newness of Life

Acts ii. 13.—'These men are full of new wine.'

THERE is no more delightful feeling than that which is awakened when something entirely new comes into our life. It works a change upon us as great and sudden as does the sun when it bursts out from behind a cloud and floods the earth with light. Suddenly we are in a new world, although really it is the same in every particular except one, namely, that now there is a new light over all. A really new thing coming into our life has often the same effect. The new thing may be a very little thing. We may only be awaiting the arrival of a friend, or we may have had a little success after a series of failures and when we had almost given up hope. In any case, it is enough to work an amazing change within us; it stirs and enlivens us and puts us even into better health. For a time we are back in a world where the unexpected can happen.

Recall any time when something new and bright came into your life and you will remember what an amazing influence it had upon you—an influence entirely out of proportion to the value of the thing itself. You caught yourself singing, you became kind to those about you, you were emancipated from that dull stupor of selfishness which is our curse—and all this because a new thing had come to you. Now it is not the new thing itself which has this power. It is that the new thing gives you a new way of looking at life; it opens out a new order of ideas. It changes your view by changing your point of view. It is as if you had been looking right into a stone wall, when suddenly some one wheeled you round, and there before you stretched the sea! This sudden happiness and eagerness which a new thing awakens has really a religious basis and quality. The fact is, you are happy at such a time because you feel yourself in a living world, not a dead one, in a world where new things can happen and do happen, things which seem to single you out and to whisper a blessed secret to you in particular. When a new thing comes to you and you rise upon wings, you are happy because you feel—dimly indeed—that you are in a world which is spiritual.

What must it have been, then, for the disciples on the day of Pentecost to realize for the first time that there is such a person as the Holy Spirit? If we could think ourselves back into their situation and recapture the emotion of this idea we might not think the exuberance of their joy too extravagant or the scene so strange.

Let us ask first what the outsider thought, and then what it meant to the disciples themselves.

1. As the onlookers saw these men and women, ordinarily reasonable and serious-minded, break into fierce excitement and unbalanced enthusiasm they had only one obvious explanation—these people are drunk! And this criticism was not in any way the outcome of a bad heart, or the suspicion of hatred. It was launched, no doubt, with a touch of supercilious mockery or in polite pity. But the critics seem to have been perfectly honest in their judgment. What took place could only be explained, in their view, by the belief that the disciples were intoxicated and had passed the bounds of decency and reason. It seemed a probable and common-sense ex-

planation, and in any other similar case, it would likely have been true.

But while this may seem reasonable and common sense, it is the criticism of an outsider, a mere bystander who has no first-hand knowledge of any of the experiences which lie behind the event! It is purely a surface judgment, from the edge of the crowd, formed from no intimate knowledge of the facts or experiences which it criticizes. It suggests to us the larger question, whether the criticism of an outsider is ever worth any serious attention. In a matter of science, for instance, we do not attribute any value to the judgment of an outsider. If one who stands merely on the fringe of things remarks to an astronomer, 'You don't tell me, surely, that that little twinkling star is a million times bigger than the earth,' what does the astonomer say? He says merely, 'Have you studied this subject at all? If you are only speaking from the edge of the crowd, your views are not worth the flick of my fingers.' There is no hint of intellectual insolence in this attitude; it only means that where there is *specialized experience*, the outsider or the 'man in the street' doesn't count! . . . Yet we think he should always count in religion. We are constantly told to consult the man in the street, or to prune our message according to his tests. But Jesus never did that: He and the apostles believed that spiritual things can only be spiritually discerned. Religion can only be judged by those who enter into its experience. The man in the street—so long as he remains *in the street*—has as little right to pass judgments on religious facts as on scientific facts!

¶ 'In our day,' writes Bishop Gore, 'it is both ludicrous and lamentable to see how men and women go utterly astray because they give themselves freely to the criticism of religion without any serious attempt to ascertain what, in its best form and as a coherent whole, that religion means.'

Look for a moment at this typical case of an outsider's criticism. We know that the man who expressed it did not inquire into any of the facts. He knew nothing about the character and work of the disciples. He merely saw some things happening which he could not understand, or which did not fit in with his limited experience. So he brushed the incident aside with the lowest materialistic explanation that leapt to his mind. 'These men are full of new wine.' It is the outsider's condemnation that *that* seemed the only explanation to him!

The man on the edge of the crowd is constantly judging Jesus and His people in these easy, stupid ways. He finds, for instance, that you are sometimes passionately enthusiastic, or fiercely indignant at some wrong. You do yourself hurt for conscience' sake, or you stint yourself for some visionary ideal. And he says, with a shake of his head, 'Good people no doubt, but unbalanced—they are full of new wine.' And he is quite right. Although his judgment is foolishly wrong, it is yet one of the finest criticisms that has ever been passed on religion. There is no finer indirect testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit than this mocking criticism. . . . It reminds us of another historic judgment, where mockers hit upon a buried truth. They took Jesus, dressed Him in purple, put a crown on His head and a reed in His hand, and cried in raillery, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And that is the only true thing spoken in that historic trial—'King of the Jews!'

The outsider's criticism of the events of Pentecost was right. He noticed what is the real essence of any life that is touched and swayed by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit had descended on the young Church like a flash of light, throwing it for the time into amazement and outrageous joy. Our observer expressed the matter foolishly, of course; but he saw the amazing truth. He observed that Christianity is indeed a Divine intoxication. Jesus comes into a man's life with a rush, shaking him from his sin, changing all his values, swinging him round to look into the eyes of God. But what does the outside observer say about it all?—'mad,' 'a strange folly,' 'drunk with a dream.'

The real Christian is 'a fool for Christ's sake.' Those bleached bones of Livingstone in Central Africa, Mary Slessor in her mud-hut in Calabar, the Covenanters on the Scottish hills, Latimer on his heap of faggots—what can the world say of them except that they are 'drunk with a dream'? But it is a foolish explanation of a real truth!

¶ 'If,' says old Matthew Mead in his *Almost Christian*, 'if the preaching of Christ is to the world foolishness, then it is no wonder that the disciples of Christ are to the world fools.

For, according to the Gospel, a man must die in order to live; he must be lost who would be found; he must have nothing who would have all things; he must be condemned who would be redeemed. . . . He is no true Christian who is not the world's fool.'

2. What did it mean to the disciples? Before He left the earth their Master Jesus had definitely promised that the Spirit would bring them 'power.' At Pentecost they had its first instalment. What did this power mean to them and how did it show itself in their lives and in the common life of the little Christian community?

Two of the ways in which this new-found energy expressed itself stand out.

(1) The first we might call *moral effectiveness*. That phrase sounds rather dull, but the thing was very far from dull. It was startling, wonderful, adventurous, and, in particular, it was new. Their Lord had shown them a new way of living—the way of trust, the way of friendship, the way of love, and that not for a selected circle, but as the universal rule to include everybody. He had talked to them about it, He had told them stories about it, and, above all, in the carpenter's shop, among the fishermen by the lake, on the road and in the towns, and at last in those awful hours when He was done to death, He had shown them by His own doings what His law of love looked like and what it involved. And then He said to them, in effect, Go and do likewise: go and show men everywhere that this idea of all human beings as brothers and sisters in the family of God is a practicable thing. Of course, they wanted to do what He said. Pentecost fanned the flame of that desire into a white-hot passion, and gave them the knowledge and the strength to translate that passion into deed. They at once started putting it into practice among themselves. In virtue of their love of Christ they actually were a band of brothers belonging to one family. They were ready and courageous with their sermons, with their talks to any who would come and listen; but then, as now, the converting power which they wielded was doubtless to be found still more in what they did and the way they lived than in what they said. You cannot bully or frighten or trick men into the Kingdom of God; but when you try to love them into it they find it quite difficult to keep outside.

¶ When Goldsmith describes his ideal parson he puts this as his highest qualification, that he 'allured to brighter worlds and led the way.'

> And, as a bird each fond endearment tries
> To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,
> He tried each art, reproved each dull delay,
> Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way.

(2) A second striking feature of their life and work, directly traceable to that fresh spiritual endowment, was *the confidence, the buoyancy, the enthusiasm* which never left them, however uphill their tasks or perilous their situations. Just as a lover sees everything and everybody bathed in a kind of transfiguring radiance, so these men and women, possessed by the Spirit of the Living Christ, found themselves bubbling over with a joy and a happiness which they longed to share with everybody else. They seemed to realize and to carry out exactly what the Master had meant when He told them that men might have life and might have it more abundantly. There is nothing small or petty or timid about their point of view or their actions: there is no halting, or hesitancy, or half-measures. It is a large experience that they are entering. It is a complete life they have got hold of. It is a certain remedy for sin that they have found, a sure antidote to suffering, a full redemption for all who are willing to receive it. It is this exuberant life which is the secret of their astounding power and evangelistic success.

> Old sorrows that sat at the heart's sealed gate
> Like sentinels grim and sad,
> While out in the night, damp, weary and late,
> The King, with a gift divinely great,
> Waited to make me glad;
>
> Old fears that hung like a changing cloud
> Over a sunless day;
> Old burdens that kept the spirit bowed,
> Old wrongs that rankled and clamoured loud—
> They have passed like a dream away.
>
> In the world without and the world within
> He maketh the old things new;
> The touch of sorrow, and stain of sin,
> Have fled from the gate where the King came in,
> From the chill night's damp and dew.

Anew in the heavens the sweet stars shine,
On earth new blossoms spring;
The old life lost in the Life divine,
'Thy will be mine, my will is thine,'
Is the new song the new hearts sing.[1]

The gospel is news! Equipped only with their message and their joy they challenged tremendous odds. They moved among cities full of moral corruption, and had to find a gospel for men polluted by devouring passions, but they did not advise such people to try and creep back to something like decency again. The decisiveness of St Paul's strategy in the battle with sin takes your breath away. For every man, however shameful his fall, however terrible his passions or wasted his strength, there is always a splendid option—not a bare escape, but a full tide of obliterating forgiveness, of love and joy and peace.

This is That

Acts ii. 16.—'This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.'

Nothing we know of Simon Peter up to this point prepares us for the revelation of this kind of power in the man—the power of a thinker, an expositor, a student of the mysteries of the ways of God with man. We had not expected a grasp like this of the principles of the Divine Government, the purpose of God which makes the centuries one. Hundreds of years before, a prophet foresaw a day when the holy fires of inspiration would kindle within the common heart, when age would have its dream of good, and youth its vision of great things on the way, when on all—even the slaves and serving maidens — would be poured out the heaven-sent fire. Now the day has come. And looking all around him on the kindled minds, on the souls filled to overflowing with new and wonderful power, Peter says, 'You have read of the prophecy of Joel. Well, this is *that*.'

Hundreds of years ago a word in a book, it is now a fact in the experience of living men. Prophecy then, it is history now. Long years lay between, but no lapse of time could alter the purposes of God. Centuries could not sever the connecting link between things that were one and the same. *This* is *that*. There were those who thought it something else. 'The men are full of new wine': so the cynical and unbelieving onlookers. 'The men are full of God,' was the answer of Peter. And he amplified the answer. Jesus of Nazareth, the man you crucified, is the God from heaven. He is risen, as you well know; and a new power is in the world. 'Behold the day cometh,' said the prophet. It has come, says Peter. This is the accomplished fact; that was the presentiment in the soul of a God-inspired man. This is the thing; that was the thought of the thing. The years lie between; *Christ* is between; but the identity remains; *this* is *that*.

Peter has got hold of a great principle. *This* grows out of *that* all the world over, all the centuries through. In Nature, in history, in the single soul, nothing comes unheralded, or without preparation or without a sufficient reason. Everything has a history although we may fail to see it; the underlying causes may be undiscerned, but all is there in promise and in potency, as the oak in the acorn, as the man in the child, and as both in the thought of God. So it is all through life. *There* the creative Spirit broods over chaos and *here* is the ordered world; flowers and fruit and seas and mountains and stars. The beginning and the end may be far sundered and seem strangely different. But nevertheless this is that. True of all the physical universe, it is true also of all that lives and moves within it. Nothing causeless comes.

¶ When Emerson and Carlyle met and walked together over the Dumfriesshire dales, they sat down and talked of the immortality of the soul. Carlyle said, 'Ay, how strangely things are connected: Christ died on Calvary: that built Dunscore kirk yonder: that brought you and me together.'

1. The principle holds true in the moral world. Think of all that is pure and just and right, all that is gentle and unselfish and loving. Then name reverently the name of God; for this is that. Things at a wide remove and strangely different in appearance may nevertheless be the same. Take our sins of will, our mistakes of judgment. We may only reap long after the full harvest of an evil sowing. And there may be no apparent connection. The prodigal in the pride of his youth demands the portion of goods that falleth to him. Long after, the dis-

[1] Mary Lowe Dickinson.

illusioned swineherd is left alone with his rags and his husks. Kaiser Wilhelm fed his soul on dreams of dominance and false philosophies, and the fields of France and Poland were drenched with blood. *This* is *that.*

Nothing can be surer than this, that if we are to begin afresh on the old lines of rivalry in armaments we shall work up again, in time, to the old catastrophe.

¶ Dr Jefferson of New York tells of a conversation he had recently with the President of a Chinese University, whose words he says left him shamefaced and speechless. The Chinese scholar said: 'China must arm. No Oriental nation can have the respect of the Christian nations of the West unless it is armed. No Oriental nation can expect justice at the hands of any Christian nation unless it is armed. There is nothing, then, for us but to arm. We must go contrary to the traditions of our people and to the principles of the greatest of our sages in order to secure justice at the hands of the nations of the West.' [1]

If we multiply our armaments, if we do not throw our whole weight on the side of the great causes of to-day, if we let the old errors and delusions remain—then, in a new Armageddon our children's children, thinking of all we with our opportunity have done and failed to do, thinking of the ruin around them, of the brave blood spilt needlessly and all the inevitable pain and sorrow, will say truly, *This* is *that.*

2. There are two things which belong to the very heart and substance of St Peter's great message.

(1) The first is that a great prophecy of old time was being fulfilled. A new power had come into the world; power to the humblest as to the highest; power that had in it the potency of a changed world. It had come, and come to them, the thing that the prophets of old had lived for and hoped for and longed to see. It had arrived—the power from above, the gift of holy fire; lifting, cleansing, ennobling men's souls. It had come. And its coming meant, sooner or later, the realization of all the prophets had spoken, of all Christ had died and risen again to make sure. The Apostle saw it and understood. He opened his Bible at the Book of Joel and he said, *This* is *that.*

[1] A. Peel, in *The Congregational Quarterly*, July 1927.

(2) But it only became a reality for him and for his generation because he believed in it, opened his soul to it, made his beating heart and his thinking brain the instrument for its manifestation. Otherwise there would have been no 'this' to *be* 'that.' For it is in living souls and enlightened minds and yielded wills that the power of God acts. In this way prophecy will be fulfilled. We are all fellow-workers with God in the making of the world. He can only do with the world what those who believe in Him and trust Him make possible, and have the courage to attempt in His name. There is always something to do, something to be brave for amid unbelieving crowds. All the prophecies are not fulfilled—not by a long way.

Take this one. 'He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths. And He shall judge among many people and rebuke strong nations afar off, and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.'

Let the nations honour God as nations, putting their religion into their national and international engagements and ideals. Let them say, '*He* shall teach us of His ways. We will walk in *His* paths.' And then when they see what that will do for nations and the world, how justice elevates, how righteousness exalts and unites, then the armaments will scrap themselves or exist only like force within the individual state to execute the behests of a tribunal that all acknowledge in common.

Were half the power that fills the world with terror,
Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts,
Given to redeem the human mind from error,
There were no need of arsenals or forts.

This will not come in a moment or be won without a struggle. But for us at least, in our generation, it is now or never. For the thing has come close to us. It is at our doors. What an opportunity for us to glorify God in the highest and ensure peace on earth among men of goodwill. This same Jesus whom the nations have crucified is already giving His holy and healing spirit. And the question is

whether in this great matter of national and international righteousness He is going to see of the travail of His soul at last. Is the solution going to be Christian?

Visions and Dreams

Acts ii. 17.—'Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.'

1. There are times in the world's history when men are conscious of a new power in their midst. They may be compared to the spring-time, when all Nature is astir, so to speak, with the thrill of a new life. We feel there is something at work—inspiring, transforming. What is it? Men call it by different names, but by no better name than that of the Psalmist: 'When thou lettest thy breath go forth they shall be made, and thou shalt renew the face of the earth.' Thy breath, Thy spirit! but by whatever names we call it, it is there, its presence is known in our midst: 'its sound goes out into all lands, and its words unto the ends of the earth!'

And so, we may say, in the affairs of men—in their hearts and thoughts and imaginations—there are times of refreshment and renewal when a new power is felt, and seen to be at work amongst them. There have been periods in which the human race has seemed to leap forward with a great stride, and advance more, in a short time, than it has done in hundreds of years previously. Such a time for instance, says Percy Gardner, was 'the marvellous sixth century before our era, when in Asia there was the rise of the great civilizing Persian Empire, the return of the Jews to their own country, the establishment of the Jewish theocracy, and the prophecies of the later Isaiah, the spread of Buddhism in India, and the teaching in China of the great Confucius; while in Europe it was marked by the sudden blooming amongst the most enlightened of nations, the Greeks, of poetry and art, of philosophy and history.' Such a time, again, was the period of the Renaissance—as it has been called—'the new birth,' followed by the Reformation. Or again, there was the time of the French Revolution, when 'young men saw visions, and old men dreamed dreams.' And why should we deny that at all such times as these there have been outpourings of the Spirit of God? No doubt we may see evil mingled with the good; the working of human sinfulness and pride and violence and perversity; but we may well believe that, whenever we see man striving for high ideals in art, or government, in truth and liberty, that there the Spirit of beauty, and order, and truth, and freedom, has been teaching men.

But of all the movements in human history there is none which can be, for one moment, compared with Pentecost. However the coming of the Holy Spirit may be explained, it is a fact which is beyond all dispute—the appearance of *a new and wonderful power in the lives of men.*

2. One mark of the presence of the new power in the hearts of men was that on which St Peter lays stress here. Standing among the waiting crowd, he sees the fulfilment of an old prophecy, 'It shall come to pass in those days, saith the Lord, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.' The mark of the presence of the Spirit was not merely a change of life but *a quickening of spiritual vision*; an enlarging and elevating of ideals; a high enthusiasm which would lift men above the common level and show them heights of possibility, for themselves and others, to which they had not yet attained—to which in this world they might not attain, but to which they might ever be pressing forward. For this, after all, is the great test, whether of ages or of men, not what they do, but what they wish to do—not their accomplishment but their aims; not their acts, but their ideals. As George Adam Smith has pointed out in his Isaiah, 'The possession of a great ideal does not mean, as so many fondly imagine, work accomplished, it means work revealed.' And yet, in the progress of the world visions and dreams have had so great force that one might almost say that there is nothing practical but the theoretical, nothing real but the imaginary, nothing actual but the ideal. The thinker and the poet are, in the truest sense, the practical men. It is they who shape the thought and will of the nations, though the nations may be unconscious of the source from which the new inspiration comes.

Was not Columbus a dreamer and an idealist when he talked of a land across the ocean,

and Luther, at the age of thirty-four, when he began his great controversy with the Papacy, and Francis Bacon, when, a youth of sixteen, he felt dissatisfied with the ancient philosophy, and dreamt of something clearer and more logical, and William Lloyd Garrison, who printed his little newspaper, in which he declared, 'I will be heard'? The unmistakable evidence of history is that the truest and most real thing in the world is not bare matter of fact.

¶ In his speech on the death of Gladstone, Lord Salisbury said: 'What he sought was the attainment of high ideals, and he is honoured by his countrymen because through so many years, across so many vicissitudes and conflicts, they had recognized this one quality of action which has never ceased to be felt.'

But it must be said further that ideals would be worth having, even though they never came true. Indeed, one might almost pity the man whose ideals are entirely fulfilled, whose ambitions are completely satisfied. Browning has taught, what to some will be a hard doctrine, that it is better to have a high ideal and miss it, than to have a low ideal and gain it. He makes Andrea del Sarto, 'the faultless painter,' declare that there burns a truer light of God in the twenty painters in Fiesole who all their lives agonize to do and fail in doing what is easy to his own low-pulsed forth-right craftsman's hand.

Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
. . . . .
Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?

Elsewhere he teaches that he must be a brute whose soul is suited by his flesh, and sings—

What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me:
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.

¶ In his book on America, Mr H. G. Wells describes a conversation with Mr Roosevelt in which he asked the President how he could be sure that American civilization would attain its goal and not end in collapse. 'Mr Roosevelt,' he says, 'with one of those sudden movements of his, knelt forward in his garden chair, and addressed me very earnestly over the back, clutching it, and then thrusting out, with his familiar gesture, a hand first partly opened and then closed, "Suppose it all ends in collapse," he said slowly, "that doesn't matter now. The effort is real. It is worth going on with. The effort is worth it, even then."'

3. Now, what are we to say of our own time? How far has it any enthusiastic idealism? We live in an age which often seems to be lacking in any high inspiration—we find it in many ways. There is the common complaint that (except in the regions of physical science) there are no great men to-day. In literature and in art there is a good deal of excellent work, but hardly anything is really great. Great causes somehow seem just now to be 'at a discount.' We are full of disillusionment, still under the shadow of a war in which many men fought for the sake of ideals, for the eternal values, and which has given us little yet but disappointment. And so in religion, we are conscious of a slackness of interest, of an absence of strong enthusiasm. Great religious movements, which once ran very strong, have died away: their fire is spent. We are as men who are waiting for some new power to come and arouse us. And as in the past ages the Spirit of God has come, in various manners, to restore the fainting hearts of men, and to revive that which seemed ready to perish, so we may well believe He will come now. We cannot say how. But we can, we ought to join in prayer, that there may again be a 'time of refreshment,' and like the first disciples, we can wait in faith and patience for the coming of the Holy Ghost.

¶ After every war always there is a period of stagnation, always followed by a glorious reaction. Think it out! Marlborough's campaigns, and then that utter deadness when the French ambassador reported that in England Christianity was obsolete. And then? Why then, Wesley came and made the doleful folk look foolish, as is usual in the same world with God. The long Napoleonic wars, and five and twenty years of spiritual apathy thereafter. Yes, but followed by the glory of Disruption days in Scotland, and the amazing rush of the Tractarian movement over England.

Tired and disappointed, men will again turn

towards that Jesus Christ whom now they thrust impatiently aside. . . . What sign of it, you ask? Never a ripple on the waters! Still only a glassy sea, where we rock idly, make no progress, even drift back somewhat with the tides. Yet, for trained eyes, already there are darkening patches on the water that tell us that the winds of God are nearer than folk think. For is not the most striking feature of our day the frank fashion in which our leaders, admitting themselves baffled by a time too difficult for them, are turning to the Church, throwing the burden of things on it and its preaching and its pulpit as the one power that can pull us through? 'We had not the requisite religious force behind us,' said Lloyd George, referring to the failure of the Genoa Conference; 'and it is for the Church to supply that.' 'We must look to the leaders of religion,' said the Premier of Japan, 'for the carrying out by their different countries of the Washington Agreements.' 'No military preparedness,' said Earl Haig, 'no political expedient can guarantee the kind of peace on which the heart of the world is set. The Christian religion, backed by a united Christendom and a Church as daring and heroic on spiritual lines as the army has been on military lines is the only hope of the world, and of the solution of the great problems with which the world is faced.' [1]

But we must not only speak of whole Churches or Societies. The question is one that affects us as individuals. 'Your young men shall see visions.' Here is the great privilege of youth—to see visions. We can forgive youth many things, many weaknesses and follies—but we cannot forgive it the dull worldliness which sees in life nothing but the opportunities of gain or pleasure. There are times when it looks as though the extreme pursuit of pleasure, or absorption in athletic 'records' left little room for ideals and enthusiasms. But still this must always be the great question for youth—What visions do you see? to what shining heights of character and achievement are you pressing on? Do you ever say—

> Here and here has England helped me;
> How can I help England? Say.

In the work of the Church, in the high adventures of our mission fields abroad, in the cause of disarmament, in the social settlement of our great towns—there is room for 'visions'; room also for the quiet enthusiasm which—when the 'tongues of fire' are no longer visible—carries men along in useful and unselfish work when 'tasks in hours of insight willed, can be through hours of gloom fulfilled.'

'Your old men shall dream dreams.' Here is even a greater work of the Spirit! For how easy it is, as men grow older, to let their old beliefs and enthusiasm die away—and even to regard them at last with a sort of cynical contempt! For life is full of disappointments and disillusionments, and it is so easy to come to this state. But when we see old men who have not lost any of the old enthusiasms, who are still full of hope for and interest in the world which is receding from them—we know that this is the work of the Spirit. There are dreams which we all must dream if life is to be of any value. There are dreams of love, when men forget their selfishness in a high affection which enlarges and purifies the heart. There are dreams of goodness which forbid us to be contented with ourselves, which reveal possibilities that we must strive for, among all our failures—some 'measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.' There are dreams of God, of the Perfect Love, and Goodness and Beauty, of which we can only catch dim glimpses now. 'But dreams pass,' men tell us, 'one day we shall wake.' Wake!—yes—but what if it be as the Psalmist hoped . . . 'When I wake up after thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.'

[1] A. J. Gossip, *In Christ's Stead*, 29.

The Easy Way Out

A Meditation

Acts ii. 21.—'And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

In St Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost we read, 'I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' Does not the last verse 'break with laughter from the dark'? Wonders of grace have been

contending with wonders of Nature. Old men are dreaming dreams, young men behold visions, and maidens prophesy. There are wonders in heaven—the sun turned into darkness, and the moon into blood. Blood and fire and vapour of smoke colour the astonished earth. Yet there need be no fear. Only catch at God's skirts and pray, and the danger is over. The true world within the world is safe, that world of which ours is but the bounding shore. Even when the storm rises not calmly, quietly, gradually, but suddenly and with terrific manifestation, it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

¶ Such a soul is free from the outward man, and easily enters into the inner solitude, where she sees none but God, and herself in Him, loving Him with Quiet, with Peace, and with true Love. There in that secret Centre God is tenderly speaking to her, teaching her a new Kingdom, true Peace and Joy.

This spiritual, abstracted and retired soul hath her peace no more broken, though outwardly she may meet with combats; because, through the infinite distance, tempests do never reach to that serenest Heaven within, where abideth pure and perfect Love; and though sometimes she finds herself forsaken, opposed and desolate, this is but the fury of a storm, which can only threaten and rage without.[1]

In a sense this is true of every crisis in personal life and in the life of nations. It is true even to the point that the deliverance comes in an instant. But it is true in the manner of the gospel story where it is written they willingly received Him into the ship, and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went. Literally it was not so. The storm ceased, and there was a great calm, but they did not at once attain the shore. They had reached their rest notwithstanding. Jesus is the true land to which His people go, and once receiving Him they were safe and blessed. The desired haven is Himself. It does not always happen that the storm instantly dies down, and the rest of the voyage is peaceable. Far from it. There may be buffetings, and fears, and cross winds, and dangers of every kind, but there is a Strength that keeps us in strength, and a Love that overcomes the world. Often we may be ready to faint; sometimes we may stand still, or even seem to be driven back for the time, but there is no fear of the end. There was a saint who in dying desired that the story of St Paul in Adria should be read to him, and went home when they had completed the verse, 'And so it came to pass that they escaped all safe to land.'

[1] Miguel de Molinos.

> As the bird trims her to the gale,
> I trim myself to the storm of time,
> I man the rudder, reef the sail,
> Obey the voice at eve obeyed at prime:
> 'Lowly faithful, banish fear,
> Right onward drive unharmed;
> The port, well worth the cruise, is near,
> And every wave is charmed.'[1]

This sudden salvation granted for a mere cry—how often is it verified in the storms that wreck the house! Sometimes, perhaps often, the channel, as Tennyson phrased it, is long smooth. The years of youth are passed safely. With the full current of life runs the full man. There are kindly curves at last, and the river falls through quiet fields before the deep comes where all is still. But even such homes of secure and sacred peace are invaded at last by the swift and dreadful Jordan. But for the great majority vicissitudes are continual. The promise, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation,' is made good from the beginning to the end. We soon discover that we have to pay for love. What then? If there is but little strength, there is enough to carry us through all. The handful of meal and the cruse of oil will last as long as we need them. There are little trials and great trials. 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' When we sit still in the house and the lights of earth are darkened, the promise may be fulfilled to us, that the Lord shall be our everlasting Light and the days of our mourning shall be ended.

¶ St Bernard asks whether Mary's sitting still in the house was a mere expression of her quiet trust in her Lord's power or the listlessness of earthly grief. And he answers, 'I will believe that it was a full and sweet reliance on the Spotless Lamb.'

What holds for the home will hold for the

[1] Emerson.

wider life. Every one striving for great public ends in the service of Church or State will approach the time of terror St Peter spoke of, the time of fainting and paling lights, of disarray, of apparent disaster and defeat. Then, too, will the word be made good, 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' When they were building Seville Cathedral they said, 'Let us raise such a work that they who come after us shall take us to have been mad.' And this in its measure is a fit resolution for every Christian. He must be ready to fight every battle, and yet fight it in perfect peace, like that French leader who would not be discouraged by the opposition or the indifference of men, by the delays of time and God. He must be ready to fall and die enveloped in his own solitary flag. He is not to look backward, but forward. How many say here, 'I pause because if I go farther I will not be followed.' Our Lord did not cease His battle because men left His side, and His disciples grew fewer and fewer. We are to go on, saying, if need be, 'I am a citizen of the centuries to come,' and above all, believing in the resurrection from the dead, the resurrection of dead consciences, dead hearts, dead wills, and of causes and faiths that seemed to be dead, but are in reality waiting their hour.

It is all so easy upon our side, but this is because it has been so hard upon God's side. 'There are many hands offered to help you,' said a saint; 'how shall you know the right? Because in the centre of the palm there is the scar of a wound received long since, but now glorious with light, according to the saying, "He had rays coming out of His hand."' Every relief, every succour, every comfort, every reward, comes to us straight from Calvary. It is because He suffered His own agony that He can be with us in ours; for us He fought the last battle with death and hell, and slept as the seed life of the world in the rocky grave that stood out from the young green, and rose again, and divided the Red Sea of death when He passed over. It is still divided; the crystal walls still stand right and left for His redeemed, and we seek His presence on the else terrible journey. 'Be content, I pray thee, go with thy servant. And he said, I will go.'

It Was Not Possible

Acts ii. 24.—'Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.'

'It was not possible that he should be holden of it.' That is a stupendous assertion. Peter does not say simply that death did not hold Christ, but that it could not hold Him—a bold statement in regard to death in the world, in view of the fact that countless generations have gone to a 'bourne whence no traveller returns.' What Peter says of Jesus is in effect, 'It stands to reason that death could not hold Him.'

¶ 'Alpha of the Plough' in one of his essays, tells of a soldier whom he met in the days of the War, who was obsessed by the belief that Kitchener was still alive, and would yet come to his country's aid. 'I can't never believe that he's dead,' he said. 'I can't do it. No, I can't believe it. Stands to reason.'

For three years Peter had companied with Jesus; he had seen His 'mighty works'; he had heard His yet more wondrous words; and then, beyond all that He did or said, there was Himself. For three years Peter had been with Him, and the white wonder of that holy life had drawn and held him like a spell. He could not think of that Personality, so abounding in creative energy, as dead. He was not speculating or making a bold guess. He had seen his risen Lord and had spoken with Him. And yet his faith seems to rest on deeper grounds than sight or speech. He does not say, 'Jesus is alive. I have seen Him.' No, he says, 'Jesus is alive. It stands to reason that it was not possible for Death to hold Him.

¶ Says George Matheson: 'There is no miracle in the Resurrection of Christ! There would have been a miracle if He had not risen.'

There is a sense in which no good man ever dies, for death cannot quench the torch of a great spirit. The story of our race is the story of its great men. Name them over, and you have portrayed in miniature the spiritual history of mankind. If you are going to tell their story it is not enough to recount the things they said and did and were while here on earth. You must go further and tell of the influences which they have left behind them. The whole history of the Christian Church is part of the

biography of Paul. The history of all the Reformed Churches is part of the biography of Luther. Such men as these are beacon-lights of history not merely because they lightened their own generation, but because they illumine the pathway of all the generations which follow them. The Hebrew prophets passed from off this mortal stage many centuries ago, but it is absurd to think of them as conquered by Death. They are still sources of influence and of inspiration. Men still turn to them for strength and guidance. Their words are not mere echoes from a dead past; they are instinct with life and energy and power.

This is true of Jesus Christ in a supreme degree and in a unique sense. His influence lives on in the world, but more than that, He Himself lives on in the world in personal presence and power. It is absurd to associate death with Jesus. The dread tyrant could have no power over one who was filled with the very life of God. It was not possible for Death to hold Him. He appeared to His disciples and held converse with them, and His parting words as He withdrew from their sight, but not from their fellowship, were: 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the consummation of the age.'

¶ To Jesus and Him alone can Matthew Arnold's words be applied with literal truth:

Ye move through the ranks, recall the stragglers,
Refresh the outworn, praise, re-inspire the brave
. . . . .
Ye fill up the gaps in our files,
Strengthen the wavering lines.

The early Christians preached Jesus and the Resurrection. That was the burden of their message. Their first concern was not to make men assimilate the moral precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, but to make them realize that Jesus was alive and would enter into a redeeming and abiding fellowship with them. We are puzzled that Paul seems to say so little about the moral demands of Christ and so much about life 'in Christ Jesus.' But after a time we begin to understand that Paul was right. If we live in fellowship with Christ we shall have the mind of Christ, and we shall understand what is His will, and we shall have strength to obey.

This is the inmost secret of the Christian life. Jesus lives. It was not possible for death to hold Him. He is Lord of the invisible and of the visible, and for Him there are no intervening barriers or closed doors. He is the Christ who reigns on high and He is Christ *in us* 'the hope of glory.'

The world is continually bearing unconscious testimony to the reality of the living presence and power of Jesus Christ. We are wont to celebrate the centenaries of great men, in order that we may call them more clearly to memory, and may drink anew of their inspiration. But no one suggested at the beginning of this century that we should celebrate the nineteenth centenary of the birth of Jesus Christ. It would have been absurd. Jesus was not born in the first century merely. He is born anew in human hearts in every century.

The American Methodists have erected a statue of Francis Asbury, the great apostle of American Methodism, among the great men of their nation, outside the Capitol at Washington. The figure of the flaming evangelist will be a constant reminder to the American people of the imperishable things of the Spirit. Why do we not erect statues in our public places to Him who is the inspirer of every great prophet and apostle, even our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Because it stands to reason. We do not need statues of the living. *Jesus is here.* He is in our midst, in the processes of history and in our hearts—the Captain of our salvation, the author and the finisher of our faith.

¶ In answer to the question, 'In what sense do you understand the Resurrection? Do you regard it as a fact which took place two thousand years ago, or as something which still has a meaning for each one of us?' the Sâdhu replied: 'It is a living fact. If Christ did not die, and if He were not now alive, Christianity could offer nothing to the world of any more value than other religions. It is the Living Christ who makes Christianity.'[1]

It was not possible for Death to hold Him. His tomb was empty. Every tomb in which He is buried is empty. The tombs in which men bury the noble causes inspired by Him are empty. And, if we cling fast to Him, our tombs will be empty. All things will be ours—life and death, the present and the future, height and depth, because we are Christ's and Christ is God's. 'It stands to reason.'

[1] F. Heiler, *The Gospel of Sâdhu Sundar Singh*, 156.

What Shall We Do?

Acts ii. 37-39.—'Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him.' (R.V.)

If St Peter's sermon is given substantially as he delivered it, we cannot but note the courage with which he, who had declared 'I know not the man,' proclaims that God had made Him 'both Lord and Christ'; and this in the city in which He had so recently been condemned to death as a malefactor. The Jewish rulers had shown no signs of remorse for their action, and the rancour with which they had pursued the Master was likely to be exercised against His followers. Yet there is no shrinking on Peter's part. If all had ended in the Crucifixion, if there had been no Resurrection, his conduct is inexplicable. And again we are struck with his grasp of Biblical truth. We know what Peter had been but seven weeks before. Now he has grasped the Divine purpose in history, and sees that the ages are not unrelated days, but are all one in the scheme of God. The fisherman might know the letter of the Scriptures; but whence came this insight into their spirit? The only possible explanation lies in the fact that between his past and this speech comes the Pentecostal gift.

The Jews who listened to the sermon were for the most part sincerely religious. They had come from far-off lands to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, and they loved the Scriptures to which Peter appealed for proofs that Jesus was the Christ. They were deeply impressed. As they listened, the hearts of stone turned to hearts of flesh and were pricked to the quick with the stinging sense of sin. Though many of them cannot have had any direct share in the death of Jesus, yet they felt that what their own people had done, and they themselves had approved, was something to be ashamed of. There was a general cry of distress, 'What shall we do?'

Peter was ready with his answer. He called them to repentance and to open confession of Jesus Christ by baptism.

1. 'Repent' is the first word. It was the first word of the Baptist. 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' When our Lord began His public ministry He inaugurated that ministry by striking exactly the same note. 'At that time began Jesus to preach and to say, Repent,' and all His apostles and prophets and evangelists began with that self-same note. The first word is not 'Believe,' it is 'Repent.'

¶ During the whole sixty years of Wesley's continuous labours, from the time when he taught his pupils in Oxford College and the prisoners in Oxford gaol down to the last sermon that he preached, his ministry and teaching were modelled upon that of the New Testament,—it was ever a preaching of repentance. He counted it utterly useless and hopeless to preach the comforts of the gospel before he had made men feel and wince beneath the terrors of the law and the sense of offended justice.[1]

There are two Greek words translated 'repentance' in the New Testament. One of them means a change of mind, and the other that concern of soul which is sorrow. The repentance insisted upon is always the change of mind. A change of mind may involve sorrow of heart, but that is not insisted upon. Many men have truly repented without any great sorrow at the time. The sorrow has come afterwards and deepened with the passing of the years.

¶ A gentleman once asked in a Sunday school in America what was meant by the word 'repentance.' A little boy raised his hand, 'Please, sir, being sorry for your sins.' A little girl also raised her hand. 'Well,' said the gentleman turning to her, 'what do you say'? 'Please, sir, it's being sorry enough to quit.'

Repentance is the soul's judgment upon itself, in which it finds a verdict against itself and passes sentence of condemnation upon itself. That is the negative side. The positive is that the soul says: Having had a false conception, I turn back and consent to the truth about life. Repentance, therefore, is a change of motive in life, a change of the reason for living at all. The soul in the past said: Of course a man must live! The repentant soul says: It does not matter whether I live or not; the only thing that matters is that I should be right with God. That is the difference. Repentance is the full and final condemnation of the past. It does not first mean that a man gives up drinking

[1] G. T. Stokes.

and lying and thieving. All these are symptoms. The symptoms are always dealt with when you really get at the heart of the disease and deal with it. Repentance means that a man pulls up, and says, Whatever I may have talked about, and whatever I may have intellectually assented to, I have lived as though there were no God, as though God had nothing to do with me. O God! I bow before Thy throne and accept Thy rule and reign, whatever it may be! Repentance is the soul's recognition of God and submission to the actual and active sovereignty of God. There are a great many men who believe in that sovereignty intellectually who have never yielded their life to the fact of the thing that they intellectually believe. Now repentance is not merely assent to the truth that God reigns. Repentance is the relating of life to that fact.

No soul will repent but that there will come to that soul a consciousness of guilt. We have a supreme example of this in the case of Saul of Tarsus. There came a day when, as Paul the Apostle, he spoke of himself as the chief of sinners. Contact with Christ always brings the soul to a sense of its guilt. He also brings the soul to a sense of paralysis, inability.

¶ The beginning of the spiritual life seems just to consist in a consciousness of complete failure, and that consciousness ever grows deeper. This is well illustrated in Browning's account of Caponsacchi; from the time when Pompilia's smile first 'glowed' upon him, and set him—

Thinking how my life
Had shaken under me,—broke short indeed
And showed the gap 'twixt what is, what should be,—
And into what abysm the soul may slip.

2. 'Baptism' is the second word. 'Make disciples of all the nations by baptism' are the words of our Lord. 'Be baptized, every one of you, for the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off,' is St Peter's application of this passage. His language admits of various interpretations. Like much of Scripture, the speaker, when uttering these words meant probably one thing, while the words themselves mean something much wider, more catholic and universal. When Peter spoke thus he proclaimed the world-wide character of Christianity, just as when he quoted the prophet Joel's language he declared the mission of the Comforter in its most catholic aspect, embracing Gentiles as well as Jews. 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.' But the Apostle never thought of the full scope of his words. He meant, doubtless, that the promise of pardon, and acceptance, and citizenship in the heavenly kingdom was to those Jews that were present in Jerusalem, and to their children, and to all of the Jews of the Dispersion scattered afar off among the Gentiles.

They were to be baptized 'in the name of Jesus Christ.' What is done in the name of some one is done by his authority. But it is carried further in Hebrew, where to be called by some one's name stands for being under his authority or belonging to him. In a very illuminating passage St Paul claims that all the Israelites who were under the cloud and passed through the Red Sea 'were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.' He means that through participating in the common deliverance they all, without further choice, came under the authority of Moses, became his people. It is for this reason that St Paul asks the Corinthians—thankfully anticipating a negative reply—'Were you baptized into the name of Paul?' Had that been the case there might have been good ground for some holding the view that they belonged to Paul rather than to Christ. And the Apostle is so impressed with the reality of this danger that he actually thanks God that he had personally baptized only a few. For the meaning of baptizing 'into the name of' a person was that the baptized passed into his possession. To be baptized into Christ, to put on Christ, to be a member of the Body were all different ways of expressing the same central experience. Baptism symbolized and confirmed the effect of that faith—union with Christ which is the beginning of all Christian experience.

'The promise is unto you and your children'—these are gentle and tender words of St Peter. When we heard him in thunder-tones saying 'Repent!' we thought, 'an austere preacher.' But now, when the arrested people really want to know what to do, having told them what to do, he breathes upon them the very benediction of God. He says, 'There is a promise for you, there is grace in store, for you.' When God

spoke some of His tenderest words you were in His heart at the time, and your children were there. The promise is yours. Come and take it, and even on earth be almost in heaven!

The Ideal of the Church

Acts ii. 42.—'And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.'

THERE are two ways in which the New Testament exhibits to us the ideal of the Church. One is doctrinal, and is illustrated in the Epistle to the Ephesians. There the Church is set forth as the Body of Christ which is filled with His fullness—the new humanity in which all the enmities and divisions of the old are transcended. The other is historical, and is illustrated in this passage of Acts. Here we see the Church, as Luke saw it in his mind's eye, in the days of its splendid prime, when the memory of Jesus was vivid and the gift of the Spirit new. These men and women had been lifted up in the power of a mighty inspiration and now the immediate ecstasy is subdued and they face the commonplace again with a sincere consecration. They continued steadfast in the way of life.

In this passage we have four notes of the true Church as they impressed an early disciple.

1. They continued steadfastly in *the teaching of the Apostles*—rather, they waited assiduously upon their teaching. What, then, did the Apostles teach? A little further on in Acts their enemies describe them as unlearned and ignorant men; but they took knowledge of them, we are told, that they had been with Jesus. This gives us the answer to our question. They knew Jesus better than anybody else did; they never wearied telling about Him, and the Church never wearied hearing. Our Authorized Version renders the words, 'They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine'; but that is both too narrow in itself, and to the ordinary reader it suggests something false. No doubt the Apostles had doctrine even in the current sense: they had facts and interpretations of facts which constituted their gospel, and apart from which they could not have borne their testimony to Jesus at all. 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures—he was buried—the third day he rose from the dead according to the Scriptures.' But though this was no doubt accepted by all the disciples, something wider is meant here. The teaching of the Apostles would include their whole testimony to Jesus, and we believe that it is truly represented in the Gospels. This is the primitive deposit of the apostolic testimony. We must remember in particular that it contained not only doctrines in the narrower sense of the word, but the revelation of a new life to which Christians were called. 'Go and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' Everything that is covered by the name of Jesus, the whole appeal made to men by His words and life and death, is included in the teaching of the Apostles to which the early Church was devoted.

The disciples had no temptation to set any of their faith aside for they had proved and tested these teachings and in their experience they had discovered that they worked. They could not doubt the doctrine and the presence of the risen Lord. Nor could they question the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. They knew the power of the great emancipation. They knew the Holy Spirit as a Guide and Friend. We cannot afford to be for ever suspecting the articles of our faith. We cannot afford to spend our life prospecting for a creed. There are some things we have got to settle, to make up our minds about, and risk our lives upon. There are some things we too have experimented upon, and the experiment has resulted in a great and fruitful experience. In these things we must continue steadfastly.

¶ 'Do not worry too much,' said Mr Birrell at Whitefield's Institute, 'over the many things you are in doubt about; hang on with all your weight to the things, however few, about which you are certain, and on the top of these certainties pile up work, work, work!'

There are people nowadays who have a contempt for sermons. Some even disparage preaching on the plea of devotion: we do not go to church to hear sermons, they say, but to worship God. If the sermon in church is what it ought to be there should be nothing in it even conceivably in contrast with worship. What can be more truly described as worship than hearing the word of God as it ought to be heard, hearing it with penitence, with faith,

with self-consecration, with vows of new obedience? We may sorrowfully confess that in all our churches there is too little worship, that adoration is rare, but we will not mend these deficiencies by thrusting into the background the testimony to Jesus.

2. The second mark of the Church in its early beauty was that they continued steadfastly in *the fellowship*. Strictly fellowship means joint participation, or mutual giving and receiving, and it refers to the peculiar conditions of life in that early society as they are described in the opening chapters of Acts. 'They were together'; 'they had all things common'; 'there was no one in want among them.' The Church was a family in which the new law of love was actually kept even in regard to the outward necessities of life. This, and not something intangible or merely spiritual is in his mind when he says, 'They continued stedfastly in the fellowship.' And this, we must not forget, is a note of the ideal Church.

¶ Rendel Harris, who made the discovery of the lost *Apology of Aristides the Athenian Philosopher*, quotes from his own beautiful translation the following description of Christian ethics in the early part of the second century: 'They abstain from all impurity, in the hope of the recompense that is to come in another world. As for their servants or handmaids, or their children, if they have any, they persuade them to become Christians for the love they have towards them: and when they have become so, they call them without distinction brethren. They do not worship strange gods: and they walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them, and they love one another. . . . When they see the stranger they bring him to their dwellings and rejoice over him as over a true brother; for they do not call brothers those who are after the flesh, but those who are in the spirit and in God. . . . And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and if they have not an abundance of necessaries, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with the necessary food. They observe scrupulously the commandment of their Messiah: they live honestly and soberly, as the Lord their God commanded them; every morning and all hours on account of the goodnesses of God toward them they praise and laud Him, and over their food and their drink they render Him thanks. And if any righteous person of their number passes away from this world they rejoice and give thanks to God, and they follow his body, as though he were moving from one place to another. And when a child is born to any of them, they praise God, and if again it chance to die in its infancy, they praise God mightily, as for one who has passed through the world without sins. Such is the law of the Christians and such their conduct.' [1]

The problem of poverty is not so simple with us, nor is the solution of it so easy, as the early Christians supposed. But the instinct which impelled them in dealing with it was genuinely Christian, and apart from that instinct we shall never be able to deal with it at all. We must not disparage on any ground whatever the first *bona fide* attempt to make human brotherhood real. There is no true Church where the effort to do this has ceased. The more things we have in common, material as well as spiritual, the more we realize the ideal of a Christian Church.

¶ 'I have endeavoured in my tracts,' said Frederick Denison Maurice, 'to prove that if Christ be really the head of every man, and if He really have taken human flesh, there is ground for a universal fellowship among men (a fellowship that is itself the foundation of those particular fellowships of the nation and the family, which I also consider sacred). I have maintained that it is the business of a Church to assert this ground of universal fellowship; that it ought to make men understand and feel how possible it is for men as men to fraternize in Christ; how impossible it is to fraternize, except in Him.' [2]

3. The next note of the Church is of another kind, yet closely connected with this. They continued steadfastly in *the breaking of the bread*. There can be no question that here we have the Holy Communion in its primitive form as a supper of communion in which Christians commemorated the Lord's death. It is another mark of the ideal Church, as Luke apprehended it, that the Lord's Supper has a central place in its worship.

The New Testament suggests a real presence and working of Christ in the celebration of the

[1] *Aaron's Breastplate*, 143.
[2] *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, i. 258.

sacraments, when they are celebrated as they originally were, and were always intended to be, in penitence and faith. It is not a presence which is explained by transubstantiation or by consubstantiation; both these theories are meaningless answers to meaningless questions. What the New Testament suggests, and what experience confirms, is that when the Supper is celebrated Christ is again present, really present, not indeed in the sacramental elements, but in the sense of them; that is, He is present as the Lord whose body was broken and His blood shed for men, present in the power of His atonement, present to be the meat and drink of the soul. It is this which gives the sacraments their place of honour in the Church. They are not explanations, or theories, but facts; they remind us that faith rests not on any doctrine or wisdom of men, but on the presence and the action of a redeeming God. There is no true Church in which the soul is not nourished on a present Christ, and that Christ, the very one whose body was broken and whose blood was shed for us.

¶ Francis drew a part of his joy from the communion. He gave to the Sacrament of the Eucharist that worship imbued with unutterable emotion, with joyful tears, which has aided some of the noblest of human souls to endure the burden and heat of the day. The letter of the dogma was not fixed in the thirteenth century as it is to-day, but all that is beautiful, true, potent, eternal, in the mystical feast instituted by Jesus was then alive in every heart.

The Eucharist was truly the viaticum of the soul. Like the pilgrims of Emmaus long ago, in the hour when the shades of evening fall and a vague sadness invades the soul, when the phantoms of the night awake and seem to loom up behind all our thoughts, our fathers saw the Divine and mysterious Companion coming toward them; they drank in His words, they felt His strength descending upon their hearts, all their inward being warmed again, and again they whispered, 'Abide with us, Lord, for the day is far spent and the night approacheth.'

And often their prayer was heard.[1]

4. Finally, the ideal Church of early days had this mark: they continued steadfastly in *the prayers*. The expression implies public and stated prayers: they had such in the Temple, and the custom was born again in the Church. Prayer became a new thing when it became prayer in the name of Jesus. On the one hand, Jesus was an inspiration to prayer: men could ask God for all they saw in Him—for part in His purity, His obedience, His faith, His patience, His victory. On the other hand, Jesus was a limit to prayer: men could not ask, as children of God, exemption from experiences which He was not spared; they could not ask to have no poverty, no misunderstanding, no weariness, no cross. It is a mark of the true Church to continue steadfastly in such prayers, to know that its life must be fed from heavenly springs, and to cherish its communications with God. The life to which the Church is called in Christ is a life which it cannot live alone. It can only address itself to it as it is uplifted and strengthened by contact with God. Yet who could tell whether our inability to pray, or our unwillingness, is greater, an inability and unwillingness all the more astonishing when we consider how much we need and how much God in Christ has to give.

Luke tells us some of the consequences which attended the possession of these striking notes, and it is worth while to mention them. One was *fear*: fear fell upon every soul. This is Luke's token of the presence of the supernatural. A church in which men are not awed by the unquestionable presence of God will never be a power in the world. Another was *joy*: they did eat their meat with gladness. The last is *increase*: the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved. Only the Lord can do it; and in a Church devoted to the testimony of the Apostles, to brotherly love, to adoring worship and to fervent prayer, we have the conditions in which His power works.

[1] P. Sabatier, *Life of St Francis of Assisi*, 196.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNISM

Acts ii. 44.—'And all that believed were together, and had all things common.'
Acts iv. 32.—'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.'

Christian Communism may seem a contradiction in terms, and the association of the two words would doubtless be repellent to many both on the Christian and on the Communist side. But think a moment. What is the name we give to our Christian brotherhood, and especially to the most sacred rite which binds us together in one? Is it not 'Communion,' a word which is identical in origin with Communism? And what do we call the individual members of our brotherhood? Is it not 'Communicant,' a word of the same lineage as Communist? This connection between words so sacred and so profane is sufficiently arresting, and may well suggest the question whether there is not some inward affinity, however deeply concealed. Just as all religious rites, from the most degraded to the most spiritual, are the diverse expressions of one primal instinct, so there may be some ideal, whether seen with clear or with distorted vision, towards which Christian and Communist alike aspire. It may be that what the Communist demands in a spirit of blind hatred should have been freely given by the Christian in a spirit of love, and it may be that cold indifference on the one side has kindled fury on the other.

The question of the equitable distribution of the material wealth of the world is one of the great and pressing questions of our time. And it is a question which the Christian Church cannot ignore. As Renan reminds us, the social question was raised first of all in Jerusalem, where also the Gospel of Christ was first preached. Nothing that touches human welfare is foreign to Christianity. The aim of the Gospel is not merely to save souls but to regenerate and reorganise society, and this obviously will involve problems of the lawful possession and right distribution of property. Accordingly, appeal has often been made to the Scriptures which both in the Old Testament and in the New provide ample material for discussion, and the bearing of Christian principles on the problem has been earnestly canvassed. In particular, the passages before us have been cited as evidence that the primitive Church, in the days of its purity and Pentecostal fire, was communistic.

This is an assertion which cannot be simply brushed aside. There is at least *prima facie* evidence in support of it, and it merits serious consideration. If, however, we would reach a sound conclusion we must carefully distinguish between the letter that killeth and the spirit that giveth life.

I

The Letter that Killeth

One of the greatest dangers of Bible study is an excessive literalism, which takes the words of the sacred writings at their surface value without looking more deeply to discern their real meaning. For example, the instructions which our Lord gave to His disciples when He sent them out on their first mission through the villages of Galilee have at times been obeyed in a blind and fanatical spirit. Some years ago a number of enthusiasts landed in Egypt without purse or scrip, and struck out into the desert, where presently they were found dying of starvation. The Bible, it has been said, assumes common sense on the part of its readers. So here, it may seem at first blush logical and convincing to say, 'The apostolic Church had all things common, therefore the holding of private property is an unchristian thing.' But the matter requires to be more deeply looked into if the situation is to be understood and right principles of Christian action deduced from it. Passing over the general consideration that everything done by the Apostolic Church is not recorded as a binding precedent, we must keep certain facts in view.

1. This communism of the Early Church was *entirely voluntary*. There was no rule compelling everyone, on his entrance into the Church, to surrender his property. No one was forced or even asked to do it. No doubt when the movement was at its height the force

of example would influence some who, if left to themselves, would have retained their lands. The generous givers would gain a reputation in the Church which others, like Ananias and Sapphira, coveted to obtain. And so, with secret reluctance, this husband and wife went and sold their lands. But the Apostle Peter made it clear in the case of Ananias that it was purely a voluntary matter. 'Whilst it remained was it not thine own, and after it was sold was it not in thine own power?' There is, therefore, here no precedent for a compulsory system of communism. If the spirit of Christian brotherhood moved the disciples to part with their possessions for the help of the needy, that is wholly different from passing a law to abolish private property. It is one thing to say in a spirit of love, 'All mine is thine, and I will gladly share with you, my brother'; but quite another to say in envy and hatred, 'All thine is mine, and I will take it from you by force.'

2. The communism of the Early Church was practised *on a limited scale.* No attempt was made to deal with the needs of the whole community. All the poor of Jerusalem were not embraced in the scheme. The distribution was restricted to those who belonged to the Church. It was a beautiful expression of the Christian family spirit. Here, again, we note a wide difference between such a scheme and one which would include all sorts of people—the lazy, the vicious, the greedy, the criminal. As Calvin well says of the Church's community of goods, 'the inward unity of minds goeth before as the root, and then the fruit followeth after.'[1] It might be possible successfully to administer property in common within a limited circle where all were of one mind and the spirit of brotherhood was strong, but it would not follow from that, that a community of goods which embraced all classes and creeds and characters would be wise or workable.

3. The communism of the Early Church was a *temporary and local expedient* to meet a special set of circumstances. We have only to study the position of things in Jerusalem in the early days of the Church to see how this community of goods came into vogue. Among the thousands who were converted at Pentecost many would be strangers in Jerusalem who had come to the feast. These would naturally be reluctant to return home again till they had for a season enjoyed the instruction of the apostles and the fellowship of their brethren. Others would in various ways be rendered destitute by their profession of faith, being cast off by their families or outlawed and persecuted by the Jewish authorities. Naturally the Church felt bound to stand between them and want, just as in our modern missions in India and elsewhere we are sometimes compelled to come to the aid of those who have been boycotted and reduced to poverty for their Christian faith.

But the practice in Jerusalem was never meant to be a binding rule upon the universal Church. One fact alone is sufficient to establish this, namely, that the Apostle Paul in all his planting and organizing of Churches and in all his letters of counsel to the Churches never hints at such a rule, but, assuming the institution of private property, strongly insists on the duties that belong to the possessors of it. Some indeed have gone so far as to suggest that Paul's great collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem is evidence that the mother Church had made itself bankrupt by its communism. This, however, is an extremely precarious inference. There is not the slightest hint of it in the New Testament. Paul expressly organized the collection as a means of binding together in one brotherhood the Gentile and the Jewish Churches, and of moderating, if possible, the hostility of the Jewish authorities. The special poverty of the saints in Jerusalem is amply accounted for by the persecution that scattered the Church there, as well as by the fact that the gifts and offerings of pilgrims, which must have been a considerable source of income to the inhabitants of the city, were no longer available to Christian converts.

4. The communism of the Early Church, though purely voluntary, limited in scope and a necessary expedient, was *shipwrecked on the stubborn rock of human nature.* It led to dishonesty and fraud, as in the case of Ananias. It speedily bred discontent among the Greeks, who thought that their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. And, although deacons were appointed to give more adequate supervision, we may be sure that Stephen was no more successful than Peter in pleasing everybody. Such is the weakness of human nature that schemes which are theoretically

[1] *Commentary on Acts*, i. 190.

ideal may be found unworkable in practice. Both in the Middle Ages and in modern times associations have been formed, often of deeply religious and hard-working people, to live together and hold all property in common. As many as two hundred such associations are recorded in America alone.[1] But sooner or later they have all ended in failure and dissolution. And in every case human nature has been the rock of offence. It is this weakness and malignity in the heart of man that cripples all schemes for social welfare. 'We could get a far happier England in a few months if men would lay aside all suspicions and jealousy, all desire for selfish profit and pleasure, and set to work to reform abuses. There is nothing external that prevents it. The weakness lies in the hearts of men. We do not love our neighbour as ourselves.'[2] It was the consciousness of this that made Mazzini say, 'Who can spiritualize democracy will save the world.'

II

The Spirit that Giveth Life

While, then, it becomes evident that the practice of the Early Church gives little countenance to schemes of communism in the present-day sense of the word, and while the measure of its actual success was far from encouraging, yet there is something great in it which we must now endeavour to bring into view. Obviously the sacred historian has no sense of the Church having acted foolishly or of its policy having been a failure. On the contrary he writes of it with admiration as an ideal, the first fair blossom of Christian love. It was not the mere redistribution of wealth that he regarded, but the communism of hearts that preceded and made possible the communism of goods. He saw in that something divine, something of eternal value, something which should never be allowed to recede into an impossible past or be rejected from a possible future.

There is a word in the New Testament (*κοινωνία*) for which it seems impossible to get a worthy English equivalent. It corresponds to the Latin word from which 'communion' and 'communism' are derived. It is a word which indicates in various arresting ways that the Christian spirit is a *sharing* spirit, a spirit of fellowship, a spirit whose nature it is to enter into association with others and mutually participate in the common good. The word is used to express how the Christian shares in the spirit and in the sufferings of Christ, how he shares in the common life and work of the Church, and in particular how he shares his worldly goods with his needy brother. Paul repeatedly uses the word in this last sense, applying it in particular to the collection which he organized for the poor in Jerusalem (2 Cor. viii. 4; ix. 13). He has also an adjective from the same root, which means 'willing to communicate' or share one's worldly goods (1 Tim. vi. 18). Here, then, is a new significance which we can and ought to give to the name 'communicant.' A communicant is not merely one who goes to communion or has spiritual fellowship with Christ through the Church. Over and above that, and as the practical outcome of that, he is one who is willing to share his worldly possessions with his brethren for the common good.

That this continued to be the Church's ideal is witnessed by Justin Martyr, who writes in the second century, 'We who once loved the getting of money and possessions more than aught else, now bring even what we have already into the common stock, and share it with everyone in his need.'[1] The same spirit is manifested a century or two later in the Apostolic Constitutions, where it is laid down in the fourth book that the officials of the Church are to provide 'for the orphans the care of parents, for the widows the care of husbands, for the workman work, for the stranger a house, for the hungry food, for the thirsty drink, for the naked clothing, for the sick visitation, for the prisoners assistance.'[2] This, of course, is no more than the plain application of the teaching of Jesus, who declared that all help given to the needy was to be regarded as done to Him, and who laid upon us all the great law, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'

Our political economists have been slow to acknowledge the practical bearings of this law. From the days of Locke they have been wont to preach a very high doctrine of the rights of private property, giving to it a certain sacred-

[1] Hastings, *E.R.E.*, iii. p. 780.
[2] Biknell, *The Christian Idea of Sin*, 107.

[1] *Apology*, i. 14. [2] Stokes, *Acts*, i. 201.

ness which made each man's possessions in an absolute sense his own. In recent times the rights of society as against the individual have been increasingly pressed. Those, however, who were indoctrinated in the old school have always had a suspicion that schemes of a socialistic kind were an unlawful interference with a Divinely appointed order of things. At the same time, in the inherent selfishness of human nature, the 'Haves' resent the claims of the 'Have-nots.' But there is nothing in Christian law to confer upon private property any greater sacredness than it can claim as a condition of social well-being. The gifts of God, which are the raw material of all wealth, are freely given to mankind and not to particular individuals. This is the meaning of the old Canon Law that 'by the law of nature all things are common to all; it is through the law of kings that possessions are possessed.'[1] Moreover, the social order is now so complex that all material wealth is produced by co-operative effort. Every worker, skilled and unskilled, is able to do what he does only by the aid of the machinery, the roads, the railways, the ships, and all the innumerable facilities which civilization has placed at his disposal. If any man were to be isolated from his fellows and bidden fend for himself, he would be at once reduced to the state of primitive man, and would most likely find it impossible to sustain bare life itself. From which it would appear that material wealth, when produced, belongs in the first instance to the community, and that it would pass the wit of man to determine with precision what share of it should justly be alloted to each individual.

These considerations may tend to clear the way for the application of Christian principles to the distribution of material wealth, though the true Christian spirit stands in no need of them but draws its inspiration from a higher source. The spirit of brotherly love must bear practical fruit or it is worthless. On this point the apostle James is very explicit. 'If a brother or sister be naked, or destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?' (Jas. ii. 15, 16). Truly, nothing. The Christian aim is to generate in men's hearts such a spirit as will lead freely, inevitably, and without compulsion to an equitable distribution of the good things of this life. It means that the instinctive communism of the home, where there is one purse because there is one heart, should be extended to include the brotherhood and ultimately all mankind.

The problem, of course, is, how best can this be done. It is an extremely intricate problem, for the solution of which the spirit of goodwill is not, in itself, enough. There is needed also patient investigation, expert knowledge, prolonged and earnest thought, and withal a rich gift of the wisdom that cometh from above. It is matter for congratulation that the Christian spirit is continually quickening our social sense, and that schemes of social welfare are ever being more fully developed. By communal effort we provide education for the children, hospitals for the sick, and subsistence for the aged poor, to name but a few. All these things are to the good, and are an evidence that the spirit of brotherhood has not perished from the earth. But we have still a long way to go ere the Pentecostal ideal is realised. It may be taken for certain that the Christian spirit will continue to press for further changes in the social order, changes which we, perhaps, should judge to be revolutionary. Under the pressure of the Christian spirit slavery had to go, though it had come to be regarded as an indispensable part of the divinely appointed order of things. In like manner we trust that war will have to go, and many other human institutions and customs which are contrary to the mind of Christ. It cannot be seriously denied that many of the social and economic conditions of our time are unchristian in character. If, for example, the teaching of Jesus on the peril of riches is compared with our ideas about wealth and our absorption in money-making the contrast is seen to be glaring. It may be expected, therefore, that as the Christian spirit prevails, the possession of excessive wealth will come to be regarded as discreditable, that there will be less extravagance and selfish expenditure among all classes, and that men will value their material possessions, not for the social distinction they bring or for any private indulgence that can be got out of them, but for the power they confer of helping the needy and promoting the common good.

[1] Rashdall, *Doctrine and Development*, 202.

It would appear, then, that a great task still awaits the Christian Church, the task of expressing more and more fully in every possible way under the conditions of our age the brotherly spirit of the Apostolic Church, until at length the social order is established on a completely Christian basis. Demands are made in certain quarters which we may be inclined to reject forthwith and dismiss with contempt. But it is the part of a Christian to examine these demands, even such as appear extreme and unreasonable, in a spirit of love and brotherhood, with the sole intent of discovering what can be done for the common good. It is a Christian duty to satisfy every just claim in a spirit of goodwill, and not under compulsion; nay, to go far beyond that, and freely to give without waiting to be asked.

We live in a critical time, when great social and economic problems are clamouring to be solved. If a solution is sought in hatred and violence the result can only be disaster unspeakable. But if these problems were approached and pondered and handled in a spirit of Christian love it would soon lead to happier conditions, and bring us nearer to the social ideal which the Apostolic Church had in view, when in the first fervour of brotherly love 'all were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.'

J. H. Morrison.

The Remaking of Manhood

Acts iii. 6.—'Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.'

We can hardly read these chapters of the Book of the Acts without a certain sense of wistful regret. It was a time of miraculous things. Thousands of men and women were literally made anew. Long crusted habits of sin were broken, and a new fresh life begun which filled the soul with happiness and power. It seems to us as we read these chapters, that there has passed away a glory from the earth. Is it possible for us, in these days of knowledge and wisdom, to recapture the early glory?

This story raises the whole question of how we may expect Christianity to get to work upon our lives. No one disputes the fact that a vital faith in Christ, widespread in the community, would penetrate our life in every direction, and bring a wonderful transformation. But the practical question is, Where is the power of Christ applied and how does it get to work? A great deal of the disappointment that some people feel with regard to Christianity arises because they are looking for its results in the wrong quarter. We are expecting the fruit without the root. We are looking for external results instead of making sure of that inward contact with Christ in the remaking of the soul which is the secret of all other transformations.

There are people, for instance, who tell us that the Christian faith ought to be the healing power for our bodily sickness. For them the test of faith is, whether it can take a man who is lamed by some disease and set him on his feet again without the aid of doctors. It is true that one of the effects of the Christian challenge to this man at the Gate was the healing of his body. He was lame; he had to be carried by other people, and the first thing the grace of God did for him was to make it possible for him to walk on his own feet. That kind of miracle happens; it has happened to others besides this man. But it was not the essence of his cure; it was only one effect of it.

There are people, again, who are looking for the effects of Christianity in an addition to their comfort—in new conditions of physical life. They would turn Christ into a great philanthropist and Christianity into a propaganda for social reform. There are men and women who are crying out for better conditions for whom practical Christianity is summed up in the gift of a living wage and a decent house to live in. And these things will be part of the fruit of vital Christianity. Christianity alone—neither class-interest nor self-interest—has the power of social betterment. But the truth is, it is not comfort Christ offers us in the first place; it is the mind to work for some other body's comfort. It is not security He offers us, not relief from hardship; it is, in the first place, the courage and faith which conquer hardship and rise above it, to win over it a victory of the spirit. Turn to this story. The man was lame. He was a beggar. He had been living amid bad conditions. His case touched Peter to the quick, as he looked

up with hunger in his eyes. But Peter saw beneath the surface need and the pitiful weakness of the man begging for a dole to keep body and soul alive—right down to the real trouble, which was a trouble of the soul. His first act was to refuse material help. 'Silver and gold have I none,' he said. 'Do not expect these things from me. But I have a gift for you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk on your own feet. Bring your will into action. Overcome your weakness by putting forth the strength you have. Become a new man, renewed in the secret fountains of your being. That is what I can do for you.'

¶ He was sitting one night at Oxford with a Don and enlarging on his schemes for a millennium, when the Don asked with apparent irrelevance: 'Do you believe in the heavenly Jerusalem?' 'Yes,' replied Weston. 'Ah,' said the Don, 'I wish I did, and if I did I don't think I should talk much about anything else.' The words went home and were remembered. Frank remained a Socialist all his life, but he put spiritual things first. He became more and more convinced that it was only through directing man's attention to the heavenly Jerusalem that real human progress in this world could be made.[1]

Now what did the Apostle do for that man? The solution of all our troubles lies in getting a real grasp of what it is that Christianity can do for us, and setting its power to work in our lives to-day. In this incident we get an illustration of how Christ works, and what His power is able to achieve.

1. We find that He works within the man himself, the individual man. That is His first point of attack upon the evil of life everywhere—through the heart of man. And He works by transforming the character from within. This is not to say that better external conditions will not help. There are people who can never be reached till they are attacked through some change in the conditions of their life. They are so sunk and embittered that their mind and soul are almost incapable of listening to any Christian appeal, much less of responding to it. When Moses came to the children of Israel with his great emancipating message of God, 'they hearkened not unto him for anguish of spirit, and cruel bondage.' If it were for nothing else but to get home with a message for God, it is the task of a Christian society to attack the evils which desolate the human spirit and keep it in bondage. But better conditions will not work the real miracle of a remade manhood. They will not change the man or brace the impotent will. We speak of giving man a richer life, a larger life, and that is right. But what if there be no *life* at all? What if the will be weak and the soul sodden under evil habit, and the whole nature set upon things that are unworthy?—and that happens in a mansion as well as in a slum. What if there be no life? You can change a common bee into a queen bee by feeding it upon a certain kind of diet, but it takes more than diet to change a man's moral nature; it takes the grace of God in the heart. The root of all things in heaven and earth is there—What is our will like? Do we will the things that make a man happy and strong, and brave and true, the things that make life 'life indeed' and not merely existence. And are we able to carry out what we will? It is this will of ours that is the secret of all effective manhood and womanhood. And it is in this secret place of being that Christ works to change us and renew us within. What was it that happened to this man when that spring was touched? He became a man and not a helpless thing. He was able to enter into happy relations with others, able to make his own contribution to life, able to use his life in the interests of Jesus Christ and for the purposes of His Kingdom. His whole personality was remade.

Now that is what Christ can do for men to-day, and that is our greatest need. And what is more, He can do it now. That is where all other reforms fail; we have to wait for them. We will have to wait many years till the slums are effectively dealt with, and the housing conditions made fit for men and women to live in. Social reform must come gradually; but Christ can take a man living in these present conditions, at this moment, and make him a new man, victorious over his surroundings. There are people who say that it is impossible to live a Christian life in present conditions. Here is a man in a slum-dwelling with squalor on every hand. How can he live a Christian life in a place like that? It is hard—God knows how hard. It is a miracle, a moral miracle, but it

[1] H. M. Smith, *Frank, Bishop of Zanzibar*, 18.

is just the kind of miracle that Christ can work when He gets into the heart. There were saints in Cæsar's household, according to the New Testament, and the worst conditions of to-day can hardly prove a bigger handicap than the environment of Nero's palace. To deny the redeeming power of God, in any circumstances, is to give up that faith which is the only leverage by which God can raise the world.

¶ Scientists say that the conditions of things must be right or the thing cannot survive; if you have a rose it must have the sun; if you have a willow it must have the watercourse; if you have a fern it must have a damp place. You cannot change anything unless in a corresponding change of conditions. Now, I dare say that is perfectly right, but I can show you some wonderful variations from that in another sphere. I can show you lovely flowers in cellars, I can show you honeysuckle climbing icicles, I can show you roses in December snows, I can find you a lily in a cesspool; or, if you like to drop the imagery, I can find you the noblest men and the purest women in conditions that seem utterly to defy the presence of nobleness and purity; you find the most spiritual of men in Babylon; you find men with white souls in Sodom. The grace of my Master can make us to triumph over any environment and to walk in blamelessness and honour. I tell you I have seen with my own eyes a snowdrop thrust itself through three inches of macadam. The delicate stem, frail beyond language, thrust itself through three inches of macadam. It did not believe in environment. The power of God was in its root, and it thrust itself through until it saw the blue of the sky and received the kiss of the sun; and I tell you it can be with us in the same fashion. If the power of God in a root can lift a delicate flower into the sun, the power of Christ in a human heart can make us triumph over the most uncongenial surroundings.[1]

In Angel-Court the sunless air
  Grows faint and sick; to left and right
  The cowering houses shrink from sight,
Huddled and hopeless, eyeless, bare.

Misnamed, you say? For surely rare
  Must be the angel-shapes that light
                In Angel-Court!

Nay! the Eternities are there.
  Death at the doorway stands to smite;
  Life in its garrets leaps to light;
And Love has climbed that crumbling stair
                In Angel-Court.[1]

[1] W. L. Watkinson.

2. How did this miracle come about? Can we trace the process by which this man was endowed with spiritual manhood and made fit for life? It was a case of what people call suggestion—the means by which an idea is induced in a man so strongly and powerfully that it takes hold of his being and awakens his will to carry it out, or to believe in it. But what was it that gave the power to the suggestion? It was the name of Jesus. 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.' It looks like magic, but it was not magic. Doubtless the cripple knew something about that name. The whole district was ringing with it. The very air was radiant with the afterglow of the Resurrection. The name of Jesus was not a mere name. It called up a picture, a story—'Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, whom God raised up,' as Peter put it to the magistrates. And doubtless there was that in the Apostle himself, born of the secret presence of Christ shining in his soul, which conveyed something of the very presence and power of the Master, so that to hear him speak that name, and to be in touch with him, was to be thrilled and moved by a sacred influence.

¶ William Denny lived long enough to do a noble work, leaving to young men the example of a model youth, working out as an administrator of labour the lofty ideal of a captain of industry, uttering wise, golden words on all questions affecting man's social, moral, and religious well-being, and, above all, exhibiting to a wide circle of friends in his own character a pattern of real goodness, free from cant or pretence, which has helped them to understand what Christ was, and to cherish hope for the future of the human race. 'You will never know,' wrote one of these friends in Buenos Ayres, 'the influence for good Mr Denny has had over me. I think of him almost with awe; and looking back on our life during the past few months, it seems as if I had been in personal contact with our Saviour.'[2]

[1] H. Austin Dobson.

[2] A. B. Bruce, *The Life of William Denny, Shipbuilder, Dumbarton*, 456.

Perhaps that is where we fail to-day. We do not carry the impression of Christ Himself—a living presence, a redeeming spirit, able to bring back into the world the power of all He was and did when He lived in Palestine of old. The great need of the Church to-day is to recover the power to suggest Jesus, to think with His mind, to speak with His voice, to use His methods, and employ the tactics of His love. At the suggestion of that name two or three things happened. In a moment the cripple saw a picture of the man he might be, walking and leaping and living in the fullness of his power. That vision came to him at that moment as a possible thing. As it took hold of his imagination, his doubts and fears were scattered and the burden of impotence was lifted from his will.

We have been learning, of late, that the real obstruction which keeps the will weak is something in the mind. 'We can, because we think we can.' The great achievement of Jesus was that He made men believe the new life was possible and set the will free to live it. Perhaps this man had been in the depths of despair. Every time he would rise to walk his weakness came to his mind and hypnotized him into defeat. How many people are there like that to-day? They have a weakness; they have failed in days gone by. And their very failure hypnotizes them into defeat, so that they cannot rise when they would. Or perhaps it was custom which had lain heavy upon him. He had grown used to his weakness. He had no expectation of being better, and that very dullness and apathy had settled down upon his soul, preventing him from trying to rise. That is the case with some people too. Those who try to lift their fellows out of some evil plight tell us that there is nothing so hard to battle with as apathy. But when this vision of Christ shone in upon his soul, awakening the desire of a fuller life, and bringing the hope of it, these weights of despair, and custom, which had settled down upon him were lifted, and the will was free. Are there some of us who have lain down to our sin or our circumstance? We despair of the new chance, or the fuller life. Let us get close to Christ and listen to the spiritual suggestions which He breathes into the soul. There is pardon; there is peace; there is redemption. 'Sin shall no more have dominion over you.' 'I am come to seek and to save that which was lost.' It is all there in Christ. Silver and gold has He none. Comfort and security He does not promise. Life is a fight, but it is a fight on terms which will make it victorious for the man who will listen to Christ, and dwell in His presence.

¶ What wonder that Wellington calculated the presence of Napoleon on a battlefield to be worth 40,000 troops, not only because his moves were skilful, his blows telling, but because his very presence nerved the men to do their utmost, and gave them supreme confidence in the result. Thiébault relates that early in 1797, when the French were about to invade Austria through the Carnic Alps, the humblest privates spoke confidently of entering Vienna. They did not trouble as to how it would come to pass. Enough for them that Napoleon was at their head. This explains the marvels of the years 1796–1814. They were due to the influence of one who excelled both as a strategist, a tactician, and an inspirer of men.[1]

We must open up our lives with all their impotence and weakness to Christ. That is the secret of victory. He will not carry us; Peter did not carry this man. He will not make our conditions easy; Peter gave this man nothing to smooth the path for his crippled limbs. But He will give us something better, the clasp of His own strong hand, the contagion of His radiant Spirit. He will touch the spring of our wills. He will speak to our hearts a word of power and courage.

The Stewards of God

Acts iii. 6.—'Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.'

An artist, on being asked by a friend what was the secret of his craft, replied, 'You must eliminate the unessential.' That is a faculty we all exercise more or less unconsciously, as we use our eyes and face the facts of a situation. Shame and need stare us in the face every day, and we refuse to look at them. The inner eye, like the outer, has a wonderful power of accommodation, and we see only what we want to see. But the test of our character is—What do we consider essential? What picture of

[1] J. H. Rose, *The Personality of Napoleon*, 68.

life do we see with the eye of our imagination? Is the lame man in it?

¶ 'One curious omission,' says his biographer, 'will be noted in the sermons, as in the other writings of Jeremy Taylor. The absence of almost all allusion to the life of the poor is very curious. Such references as we may discover are perfunctory and vague. The teaching of Taylor is in the main aristocratic; it is delivered from a seraphic height, and addressed to all classes of men, but particularly to those who are influential and well-to-do. No temptation, no frailty of the rich is allowed to pass unindicated or unreproved. The preacher is speaking in the private chapel of a great house, and mainly to those who are responsible from their wealth, their intellect, or their influence. Outside are the hordes of the wild Welsh, but of them the preacher never speaks and never seems to think.'[1]

There were hundreds entered the Temple at Jerusalem that day and never saw the cripple at all: he was too familiar an object there to attract attention. Some few, perhaps, flung him a contemptuous copper—caught him, so to speak, with the tail of their eye—and forgot him the next instant. To one or two his presence may have been a positive offence: they saw him with the blurred and distorted vision of prejudice as a mere blot upon the landscape. 'And Peter, fastening his eyes on him with John, said, Look on us.'

That is the Christian attitude to the lame man. It recognizes his existence. It acknowledges his right to be heard and helped. Peter and John were going into the Temple; for they were devout men and loved the House of God: but they had been with Jesus of late and learned something of His mind and habits. His ear was never deaf to a cry for help, whatever His preoccupations. So Peter and John stopped to look—and look again. It was precisely what Jesus would have done; and we who call Him Lord must have in us the mind that was in Him, and cultivate the habit of using our eyes. It is not enough to give a passing glance at the social misery around us or heave a sympathetic sigh over some peculiarly pathetic incident. However others take it, to us it must be a personal concern. The friends of the lame man, whether they fully realized it or not, were utterly right in laying him at the door of the Church. That is his proper place. The people who go to Church worship a God who said, 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.'

But the Church must not only have vision to see and own the lame man's need: she must have courage as well. The Apostles not only fastened their eyes on the cripple. They did something much more remarkable than that. They commanded him to fasten his eyes upon them. 'Look on us,' said Peter with the daring of a great faith. He not only had the will to help, but was conscious of the power to help. With all their faults the followers of Christ have not been altogether lacking in charity. The real weakness of the Church lies elsewhere. Jesus exposed it with unmistakable clearness when His disciples asked Him why they were powerless to heal the epileptic at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration. It was because of their want of faith. That verdict stands. We meet our lame man and our heart goes out to him. But we are not conscious of any saving power within us. And so we hurry past him, not in callousness but in cowardice. We simply dare not challenge him in the word of the Apostle: 'Look on us.'

This brings us sharply up against the crucial question: What have we to give the lame man? Have we anything at all to give him? In what sense can we reply with the Apostle, 'Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee'?

1. In the first place, *we must give what we have*. If we *have* silver and gold, then we must give that. We have no right to quote Peter in excuse for our lack of generosity. Remember that noble word of the Arabs: 'He that hath bread is debtor to him that hath none.' Beware of that blessed phrase 'indiscriminate charity.' It covers a multitude of sins—meanness and greed and hardness of heart.

¶ Sheridan in his *School for Scandal* has pilloried that contemptible type in Joseph Surface. 'A man of the most benevolent way of thinking,' says Sir Oliver with biting sarcasm; and Rowley replies: 'As to his way of thinking, I cannot pretend to judge; for, to do him justice, he appears to have as much speculative benevolence as any private gentleman in the kingdom, though he is seldom so

[1] Edmund Gosse, *Jeremy Taylor*, 103.

sensual as to indulge himself in the exercise of it.'

Watch and pray against this sin of 'speculative benevolence.' It is far more common than one would imagine. It is a big part of the opposition in some hearts to the political activities of the Church. They are really alarmed at the practical consequences of applied Christianity. It is a still more potent factor in creating those selfish, close-fisted, money-grabbing Christians who bring discredit upon the fair name of Christ among them that are without. 'Money talks!' says the world. It is the only language many people understand.

Lord Kelvin used to declare that he had never really grasped a scientific principle in mathematics until he was able to make a model of it. Depend upon it, you have not grasped the meaning of Christian charity until you have put it into practice. Nowhere is it more necessary to be concrete, detailed, personal; for nowhere is it easier to delude ourselves with misty fancies and a vague emotional religiosity.

¶ 'There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality, if unchecked by a deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men.' [1]

2. In the second place, *we can give only what we have.* That statement is not quite so innocent as it looks! The problem of the lame man is not primarily a financial one. It goes much deeper than that. It were a criminal folly to belittle the power of money in the service of philanthropy, but it is a still grosser foolishness to imagine that the poor want nothing but 'things to eat.' It is written not merely in Scripture but in human nature, 'Man shall not live by bread alone'; and it is they who feed the hungry hearts of men who are the truest philanthropists. The Apostle had no silver or gold, but he did have something to give: 'Such as I have give I thee.' There was no shame in his confession of poverty: there was no false modesty in his claim to power. The chief of the apostles was never a humbler or a greater man than when he spoke to the lame man at the Temple gate. He made his boast that day in his Lord. He had no money in his purse, but he had that in his gift which no wealth could buy or bestow. In the presence of the beggar's need he knew himself the almoner of God, and out of a full heart he bore his testimony: 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.'

Do not let us miss the significance of this by saying that we could not perform the miracle of healing Peter wrought. It was not Peter who wrought the miracle: it was God. All Peter had was faith, based on a personal experience of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And that is within the reach of us all. The question for us is, Have we a witness to bear as real and convincing as the Apostle's? It is passing easy, as we have seen, to quote the words of Peter as the purest cant; but to quote them in sincerity and truth is an acid test of the reality of our religious life. It is in plain fact far easier to give a shilling to a beggar in his want than to speak a word in season to him in his weariness. There is no poverty so dire and so humiliating as the spiritual poverty that has nothing to give to the hungry hearts of men.

¶ You remember how Borrow tells us of a company of gipsies who followed him crying, 'Give us God!'

'"I am neither priest nor minister," said I, "and can only say: Lord have mercy upon you!" Then getting up I flung the children some money and departed.

'"We do not want your money, sir," screamed the woman after me; "we have plenty of money. Give us God! Give us God!"' [1]

¶ I think it might be said my husband was a true 'son of consolation.' Many sent for him in their distress who were not even known to him. It was not that he said much: often he sat silent, and only listened to the tale of sorrow that was told. What he did say was always very brief, as were also his prayers; but there was an indescribable something in his words, and perhaps in the tone in which they were uttered, that reached the heart, drew it very close to the Heart of the Eternal Father, and left it there.[2]

3. But *we ought to have something to give.* Else what are we Christians for? Have we no witness of our own to bear of God's goodness and mercy to us? Perhaps we envy Peter for the certainty and boldness of his faith. There

[1] George Eliot.

[1] *Wild Wales*, 23.

[2] *Life and Letters of John Paterson Struthers, M.A.*, 355.

was a day, however, when he was neither bold nor certain. There is none so poor or weak or unworthy but may take heart of grace from the story of the son of Jonas. No life is too obscure or insignificant for God to use. 'For God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.'

That is the verdict of history. The Church of Christ stands to-day a living witness to its truth. And God still can and still does fulfil His purposes by very humble means. When Stewart of Lovedale urged the St Andrews Students' Club to take up Livingstonia, they shrank from so grave a responsibility on the ground that they were all unknown men. 'That matters not,' came the swift reply, 'if we are earnest men.' It is not required of us as Christ's stewards that we be rich or learned or influential. It is not even required of us that we be successful: some of God's noblest servants have died in the dark, with a sense of defeat in their hearts. What is required of us is that we be found faithful, men of faith. That is a New Testament title for Christians, and it is one to which the lowliest and least of us all can attain. We are not called to *work* miracles: our high calling in Christ is to *be* miracles—miracles of God's redeeming grace, men and women whom the world cannot explain, whom it is compelled to recognize as the product of forces other and higher than its own.

I know the face of him who with the sphere
Of unseen presences communion keeps.
His eyes retain its wonders in their clear
Unfathomable deeps.

His every feature, rugged or refined,
Shines from the inner light; and large or small
His earthly state, he from the world behind
Brings wealth that beggars all.

This in his face I see; and when we meet,
My earthliness is shamed by him; but yet
Takes hope to think that, in the unholy street
Such men are to be met.

Can that in any measure be said of us? Are we in any sense marked men as we walk 'the unholy street'?

The Holiness of Beauty

Acts iii. 10.—'The Beautiful gate of the temple.'

'Of all God's gifts to the sight of man,' says Ruskin, 'colour is the holiest, the most divine, the most solemn.' And yet how often we have shrunk from beauty in connection with worship, almost feared it, whether in the painter's art or in great music. There is, of course, a reason for that. Beauty has a sensuous as well as a spiritual appeal, and its devotees, both within and without the Church, have often been more responsive to the lower appeal than to the higher. The natural man, shirking the higher demand of the moral struggle after goodness and truth, has found a certain relief to the spiritual part of him in yielding to the emotion of the beautiful. In the days when the Church was corrupt the sensuous appeal of the beautiful remained in art and music and stately ceremonial, while the spiritual appeal, the call to goodness and truth, was neglected. Hence the revolt, the honourable and justifiable revolt, of sterner souls who, in condemning, forgot beauty's other and spiritual side, and in banning the gratification of the senses failed to reflect that even man's senses are Divinely given and meant to be gratified as well as controlled.

1. We are not saved by beauty, but life is enriched by it and impoverished without it. And in most souls there is a sleeping artist or poet for whom beauty, in architecture, in colour, in great literature and great music, furnishes at least one way of approach to the place that is holiest of all. Beauty, if it cannot itself save souls, may at least help in their saving. And there are some for whom ugliness and every offence against the canons of good taste silence, for the moment at least, a sensitive chord ready to tremble into the music of true adoration.

Then—to pass outside the temple walls—our national neglect of beauty in the disposition and arrangement of our great cities has been nothing short of sin, a sin against the human souls of their inhabitants. We are proud of our great industrial advance. Yet what a price has been paid for it, and often quite needlessly.

If we ask what were the chief architectural features of the nineteenth century, the answer is factories, smoky chimneys, and slum tenements. But in that century also 'there was a man sent from God whose name was John.' There was a gospel of beauty with John Ruskin for its prophet. Like many great prophets he preached to deaf ears and stony hearts. It was an age of utilitarianism bent on filling purses, not on creating fine personalities; on ransacking the bowels of the earth, not on beautifying its surface.

And now in the twentieth century we are reaping the consequences. It is the old story of the fathers eating sour grapes and the children's teeth being set on edge. Had the great captains of industry of last century been able to look ahead, had they listened to prophets like John Ruskin and Stopford Brooke, there would have been much less labour unrest in our own time. Any barracks then was good enough for working men. They were herded and, worst of all, herded together, in miners' rows and one- or two-roomed tenements, without the most elementary conditions of domestic decency. They were robbed of all contact with the green grass with which God clothed the fields, deprived of the sight of wild flowers that out-gloried Solomon; shut off from the matins of the lark and the evensong of the nightingale.

What happened? What, in the name of common sense, could be expected to happen? Do men gather figs from thistles or grapes from thorns? What *could* come of it but what has come, dwarfed bodies, dulled minds, vicious tastes, thwarted instincts, unsatisfied desires, and a legacy of suspicion and smouldering fires of hate to be faced and, as so often happens, atoned and suffered for by a generation honourably turning its face to better things?

2. But it may be asked, What has religion to do with all this? The first and most general answer is that religion has to do with everything; and if not with everything, with nothing. For man's nature is a unity and God's universe a harmony. But more particularly religion has to do with this, because religion deals with obligations; and a Church that in its various services emphasizes the sanctity of birth, marriage, and death cannot afford to neglect life or any of the essential parts of human nature. Clean, healthy bodies, decent domestic arrangements, beautiful surroundings, wholesome recreations, are all alike necessary to the growth of the human spirit. The call of the beautiful implies a duty, and because it has social and moral consequences it is a religious duty. It is little to the credit of the Church that she has been so silent about matters in which human souls as well as human bodies are so vitally concerned. There are other and, it may be, more important reasons why even in densely populated areas great masses of human beings are outside the Church. But this is one reason, one that tells all the time in every family and in every individual. The thwarted instinct for beauty takes its fearful revenge in low pleasures and soul-destroying vices. Devotion to his garden plot has kept many a man from the public-house, and in some instances has been the means of awaking or restoring a dormant interest in higher things. It never pays to deny legitimate exercise to any essential part of human nature. And the sense of beauty is an essential part, as we can see in any little child. The child is injured by being brought up in an ugly environment, and it is the Church's business to see to the spiritual development of the child.

God of all beauty . . .
Give us thy divine zeal for beauty
That we may transform hideous places, hideous lives and hideous souls
Into places fitted in beauty for thy habitation,
Into lives fitted in beauty for thy companionship,
Into souls fitted in beauty for thine indwelling,
Make us ambassadors of thy Kingdom,
In which all things beautiful are for ever preserved and perfected.[1]

The love of beauty, innate in the child, shows itself also in the childhood of the race. The earliest traces of nationalities are prehistoric attempts at art. Similarly, in literature poetry arises before prose. The childhood of the nation turns instinctively to what can be sung rather than to the prosaic. In later days, of which we have an historic record as well as existing memorials, we see how in varying degrees the charm of art was felt, and how the expression

[1] *A Book of Prayers written for Use in an Indian College*, 58.

of it was the spiritual bloom in each nation's life. It was so in Greece, in India, and in Egypt. Mediæval Europe saw a great efflorescence of the same spiritual satisfaction: in Norman and Gothic cathedrals, in Italian painting and sculpture, in German music, in Dutch painting, Dante's poetry, Palestrina's music, not to speak of Bach and Handel in later times, Da Vinci and Rubens. All these names suggest religion as inevitably as art. Art to them was worship, the human faculty bowed in adoration, singing with the angels, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.'

Churches that set no value on things beautiful, within their walls and without, have repelled not only many fine souls but the masses as well. And nations that neglect beauty are injuring personality and laying up for themselves many troubles.

¶ 'The worship of the future,' writes Dr G. A. Johnston Ross, 'will recognize that the God of beauty is not the enemy of the God of piety: and that splendour may be a function of awe, and spontaneity and joy express themselves fittingly in the happy use of the golden glories of God's good world. If comfortable bourgeois Protestantism sniffs at all this from the eminence of its intellectual ease, the industrial thrall whose personality is depressed, whose love of beauty is starved, who is robbed of sunshine and of the sight of clear flowers and green grass by the tyrannies of the factory and the mine, he at least will appreciate the frank acceptance by the Christian Church of all ancillary support from the beauty of the earth for the setting forth before the Lord of the sacrifice of praise.' [1]

The Gate Beautiful is a way, a legitimate, a natural, and therefore a God-appointed way, into the holy temple. There would be more beauty of holiness in the world if there were more practical recognition of the holiness of beauty. In the common life no less than in the religious, the Divine message stands: 'Whatsoever things are lovely, think on these things.'

[1] *Christian Worship and Its Future.*

Conversion

Acts iii. 19.—'Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.'

Is it possible for great and radical changes to take place in character? Is it extravagant, or against experience, to believe that there may be a mighty action of God within the soul, giving the knowledge of sin, and at the same time such assurance of Divine love and power as will transform all the relations of a man to his God, and all the inclinations of his heart? Must it be once bad, always bad? once mean, always mean? once a prey to vile passions, steeped in them for ever? Is there no power to alter this? If not, then we have no contact with Him to whom all things are possible, and nature and habit hold us helpless.

It will not serve to answer such questions by Scriptural quotations—'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' Other quotations, ready to hand, exhibit both the possibility and the fact of entire conversion, while leaving the truth in that quotation untouched. No change is desired in the Ethiopian or the leopard, for everything is good according to its kind. Conversion does not change a Washington into a Newton, or a Shakespeare into a Cromwell. It cannot make a man different from what God made him, but it can make him all that God intended him to be: it cannot add one element to those of his nature, but it can introduce peace into the midst of them, and make God their ruler instead of selfishness or passion. All real conversions take place in this way: *the heavenly Spirit looks in upon the soul,* and the soul sees Him as He is. This was St Paul's conversion. It is God who brings us into contact with Himself. He is ever willing. He is ever seeking. We have but to turn and look into His face.

1. We must be careful to distinguish conversion from regeneration. Regeneration is the absolute act of the Divine spirit, and can only take place once. It is the great mystery of life and the supreme act of the Eternal. Conversion is within the sphere of human experience, and in it the will of man co-operates with the will of God. The word means to turn

round and to go in the opposite direction. When the human soul leaves God it goes from home; when the human soul returns to God it returns home, and this turning round and this going back is conversion.

¶ The pangs of homesickness in Kornthal were turned into the first birth-pangs of the new life. No philosophical analysis can explain that religious and moral change which, on its divine side, is called the new birth, and on its human side, conversion. Most Christians can only say in regard to it that, while they were once dead, they now live, and their life is hid with Christ in God. This much I know, that in the winter and spring of 1834–35, by the grace of God, and under the guidance of your father and Professor Kullen, of blessed memory, a change occurred within me which determined all my after life and activity.[1]

The responsibility for conversion, for turning, rests with ourselves. The implications which lie behind this command 'turn yourselves' are great and far-reaching. It is assumed that man possesses the power to hear the voice of God and to respond to it. If it were otherwise, the command to turn would be pointless. It is as a moral being that man is addressed. Another thing to be noticed is this: the turning is a matter of the will. When the will is surrendered all is given. The turning of the will to God means simply that all our complex nature, without exception, is ungrudgingly placed under the direction of our Father for Him to use as He pleases.

¶ It was when my University course was over, and at a time when much outward success attended my path, that a profound conviction of the fatal guilt of sin, the sin of a resistance of the will to the blessed Maker and Master of my being, found its way to my deepest heart. No striking occasion brought it; I cannot recall word or incident as the exciting cause. But however it came, it was there in deep and dread reality. That dark time ended in a full and conscious acceptance of our crucified Redeemer in His complete atonement as peace and life.[2]

2. It would be foolish to expect uniformity of experience. As long as every man has his own history, ancestry, and idiosyncrasy, there will be many kinds of conversion. 'We must all come to Christ; but we must each come in his own way. There was individuality in our transgression: *we turned each one to his own way*. There must be individuality in our salvation; each in his own way the prodigals come home.'[1]

(1) One form of conversion is *moral*, when a man is turned from sin to holiness. Some people are kept from God by sins of the flesh. From their youth they have been held in the bondage of the senses, and they have been the slaves of their passions. They may not have sinned in act, but they have sinned in their imagination. It does not follow that their nature is coarser, it may be richer; their blood may not be fouler, it may be redder. A spring of water if it be banked will water a glen, if it run at large will make a morass. Their conversion will be not the destruction but the redemption of their passion.

¶ St Augustine had a nature fired with the African sun, and he fought hard with the awful tyranny of his lusts. 'How long,' he cried, 'O Lord, how long.' With a single blow in the garden scene Christ broke the chain of sin, and later St Augustine wrote—'Thou didst cast out my sins by coming in Thyself, thou greater sweetness.'

(2) Another form of conversion is *spiritual*, and it is the experience, not of a publican and a sinner, but of a Scribe and a Pharisee. He has not gone astray as the sinners do; he has lived with God all his days; he is not the younger but the elder brother. But there are two ways of living with God. This man has been servile, he has not been filial. His idea of God is a hard task-master, and his spirit has been that of a hireling. It is an unspeakable change when a Pharisee discovers that God is not hard or uncharitable, but that He is gracious and loving. When St Paul found that he was expected to live not in the gloom of Mount Sinai, but in the light of Calvary, and that God was not a lawgiver but a Father, he was converted from legality into grace.

(3) A third form of conversion is *intellectual*. Nathanael was not able to believe that Jesus was the Messiah on account of Scripture difficulties, and St Thomas could not believe that Jesus was the Son of God on account of rational difficulties. The solution of both problems,

[1] *The Life of Philip Schaff*, 13.
[2] *The Life of Handley Carr Glyn Moule*, 49.

[1] F. W. Boreham.

and of every other religious problem, is found in Jesus Christ Himself. When a man perplexed on every side places himself in Christ's hand to see whither Christ will lead him, and what Christ will do with him, that is conversion.

¶ Romanes, in *A Candid Examination of Theism,* wrote—'There can no longer be any doubt that the existence of a God is wholly unnecessary to explain any of the phenomena of the universe.' Afterwards he wrote *A Candid Examination of Religion,* in which we find—'How great then is Christianity as being the religion of love, and causing men to believe both in the cause of love's supremacy and the infinity of God's love to man.' Two candid examinations, and between them a conversion.

(4) There is one other form of conversion, which is *practical.* A man may be neither a slave to passion, nor a Pharisee, nor a doubter, and yet come short because he is doing nothing with his life. He is easy-going, luxurious, pleasant, useless. Conversion for him will be the call to service, perhaps in a Sunday school, or in a workman's club, perhaps to work among the sick, or to enter a town council. A young Italian was feasting with his friends, centuries ago. He wearied of the wine and of the jests; he went out and stood beneath the clear blue Umbrian sky. When his friends joined him they said—'You are in love'; and he had the distant look of a man whose thoughts were in another world. 'I am,' said St Francis, 'in love, and my bride is called poverty. No one has been anxious to woo her since Jesus lived, and I am going to serve her all my days.' We know how loyal he was to his love; and it was a distinguished Frenchman, and not a believer, who said that there never had been a Christian like St Francis since the days of Christ Himself. And that is the most beautiful kind of conversion—conversion to the service of our fellowmen under the constraint of Jesus' love.

3. There have been, and are still, false ideas of conversion abroad. With a great many it still carries the idea of impoverishment and annihilation. But it cannot be too clearly stated that Christ destroys no gift. He came not to destroy, but to fulfil. He came not to narrow and impoverish life but to give it, and give it in abundance.

St Paul gives us the whole philosophy of conversion in that verse of the Epistle to the Romans: 'For, as ye presented your members as servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now present your members as servants to righteousness and unto sanctification.' Notice that the same 'members' which once were servants of uncleanness and iniquity are now to be the servants of righteousness. Scientists talk about the 'Conservation of Energy.' Energy, they say, may change its form and change its direction, but no energy is ever lost. There is a 'conservation of energy,' too, in the realms of religion. Christ never destroys a gift or an energy. He converts it. He changes the servants of sin into servants of righteousness. He has room for, and can make use of, every gift. Whatever our gifts may be, they are used in fuller measure in the new life.

¶ 'Michael Angelo's head,' wrote the seer of Concord, 'is full of masculine and gigantic figures as gods walking, which make him savage until his furious chisel can render them into marble. There is the like tempest in every good head in which some great benefit for the world is planted. Every faculty new to each man thus goads him and drives him.' His powers may become the wrecking of him; but, if he learns to subdue and use them, they will be the making of him. And the natural passions, if trained and tamed, go towards the making of the grandest moral character and the very man of God.

Luther was all the greater as God's 'hammer' because of the vehement animal element in his blood. Santa Teresa burned with intense natural feelings, which, when mastered, turned to power and made her the more intense and conquering as a saint.[1]

If music is your gift Christ wants that music. It is often used as an incitement to sin, but He can use it as a help to righteousness. John Wesley used to pick up all the popular tunes of his day — tunes often associated with ribald words—and employ them in his services set to hymns in praise of God. 'Why should the devil have all the good music?' he used to say. 'I sing,' said Jenny Lind, 'for God.'

If humour? Christ wants your merriment and light-heartedness. There is room for laughter in religion. 'Rejoice always.' Can we not think of men who have laughed their fellows out of sin to righteousness?

[1] R. E. Welsh, *Man to Man,* 53.

If business skill? You can use that business skill for Him. You can put it at His service in the shop where you labour. You can come and use it in the management and direction of the affairs of His Church. There is no gift which Christ casts out as waste. There is no single energy which He demolishes and destroys. He wants the whole man—with every ounce of power he possesses. Christ does not annihilate. He converts.

What wonderful transformations he effects! Out of men whose lives have been sensual, boastful, ineffective He makes heroes, prophets, and martyrs.

Rejecting the Essential

Acts iv. 11.—'This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.'

Pentecost had turned St Peter into a seer. It worked upon his mind and gave him firm convictions. No one can read this story without feeling that he has passed from all uncertainty into a deep and steadfast assurance. And he has the power of putting the truth he has seen into clear and decisive speech. His audience were in no doubt as to the meaning of the challenge he threw at them with magnificent daring.

'Be it known unto you all, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.' And then, 'This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders.' Our Lord Himself teaches the same thing in connection with the parable of the Husbandmen and the Vineyard. 'This is the heir,' they said, 'come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance,' and they 'caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.' Jesus adds, 'Did ye never read in the Scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?' The casting out and slaying of the son and the rejection of the stone, our Lord Himself being our expositor, are one and the same thing.

Let us take this sentence and see what counsel and warning it has for ourselves. The builders had 'set at nought' the stone; *they had rejected the essential.* They had put on one side the very necessity for their own work. They were seeking to build a kingdom, and they left out the King! They were foolish even in search of their own ideals; they had left out the very secret of attainment. Does this not bring the incident up to date? Is it not a modern folly? Do we not seek to build permanently, and yet leave out the Eternal? The 'builders' are still at work, as busy as ever, and they are always building something. Is the issue a rubbish heap, or an enduring temple? Are we rejecting the essential? Is the stone destined by the Eternal God to be the head of the corner 'set at nought' by the builders of our own time?

1. We are trying to build *a Home.* That is a very expressive phrase, which is sometimes used by young people who are about to enter into the sacrament of wedded life. They say they are 'going to set up a house!' The purpose is begotten, the design is made, and the actual building is about to begin. What do the builders take for their materials? What makes a home? Is it all a matter of paint and paper and furniture? Does it consist in many and well-ordered rooms, with every cupboard in the house containing its needful equipment? Shall we add a little sentiment, and sentiment of a refined and lofty type? Will these constitute a home? No, out of these materials no home of stability and permanence can be raised. Is the stone set at nought by the builders? Do they give any recognition to the spiritual? Has Christ a place in the arrangements? Or in all the plans for the building, and in the actual work, is He 'despised and rejected'?

¶ The thing that most damaged in me the chances of a secure religious belief was the religious misbehaviour of my father. So far as I can remember I never had any religious instruction at home. My father compelled us to go to chapel and Sunday school, but he very seldom went to chapel himself. We children felt that religious observance was imposed upon us, not for religious but for disciplinary reasons. And this suspicion, or certainty, made Sunday all the more odious to us. Sunday was the worst day of the week, anticipated with horror, and finished with an exquisite relief. Two attendances at Sunday school and two religious services in a day! About six hours in durance, while my father either lay

in bed or read magazines in the bow window! It was inevitable that religion should come to be unalterably connected in my mind with the ideas of boredom, injustice, and insincerity.[1]

What does the Lord want to do with our homes? It is the purpose of His life that He be built into our home, and form the essential part in all its life and manifold affairs. He proclaims that the blessedness of the home depends upon His presence. For in what does a home truly consist?

(1) *A home consists in the strength and purity of its dispositions.* It is one of the problems of human life how the affections are to be kept full, pure, and sweet. They will not look after themselves. Our affections need sustenance as much as our bodies, and if they are neglected they will fall into an inevitable impoverishment. It is difficult to see how the affections are to be kept fully illumined and serviceable if the spiritual receives no recognition, and if the soul is cut away from the fountain. Let there be no Christ in the home, and we know not what is to keep the affections from failing in time of drought?

(2) *A home consists in the height and clearness of its purpose.* What are our home ambitions? What is our quest for our children? What is their likeness when we see them in the far-away day, in their strength and maturity? Do we covet for them merely the prizes of the world, and the endowments which come from transient success? Is our soul gratified when our imagination realizes them in prosperity and opulence and fame? Or are our souls fired by a higher ambition—to see them adorned with 'the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus'? Shall they be merely successful, or shall they be good? Merely clever or holy? To what does our ultimate purpose cling? How tempted we are to ambitions which are mean and low and near! Oh, the terrific force, the mesmeric power of the present evil world! Our thoughts are dragged down, and run along the horizontal plane of the common earth. If our ambitions are to be kept upon the heights we must have the presence of a power which will counteract the gravitation of the world. If we are to dwell in the heavenly places, even in our imaginations, it can be attained only by the power of the Christ. Let Christ be left out of the home and it will be a life without a firmament, a fellowship without a sky. If Christ be built into its purposes, taken into all its plans, there will be no grovelling for the petty prizes of the passing day, but a holy emulation for the treasures that endure.

(3) *A home consists in the range and permanency of its hope.* Who could bear to think that to-morrow all their home life would be ended, and all their intimate fellowships broken and destroyed. If we would regard home life as a thing indestructible, such regard can only be born in Christ our Lord. Home life in Christ abides for ever. Christ is therefore essential to the home, necessary to its affections, to its ambitions, to its unchanging hope. How can we set up home without Him? It would be representative of the earlier and fatal mistake, the builders would be setting at nought the stone purposed to be the head of the corner.

2. We are trying to build *a City.* And what are the builders putting into it? What do we accept and what do we reject? What are our materials? We emphasize clean streets, good water, airy parks, well-equipped schools. All these are good, but if these receive the supreme emphasis the builders are leaving out the chief stone. We must build Christ into the city, into all its varied and composite life. A little while ago a mystic said that she 'kneaded Christ into the bread she baked.' What such a mystical soul does in the daily life we must do in the corporate life. We must build the thought of the King into all our designs for civic and social improvement. Much of the Lord's life may be built into a city. Some time ago a Lord Mayor was asked what had most impressed him during his term of office, and he answered, 'The amazing amount of good work which is being done in the city!' He found it on every side; here and there little groups of people with minds full of the thoughts of Christ seeking to incarnate these thoughts in common life. Let us praise God for the leaven already at work, but there is much more to be done, and we can all have a share in the doing of it.

¶ My plea is for the City. But I plead for good men, because good men are good leaven. If their goodness stop short of that, if the leaven does not mix with that which is unleavened, if it does not do the work of leaven—that is, to *raise something*—it is not the

[1] Arnold Bennett, in *The Evening Standard*, Oct. 14, 1925.

leaven of Christ. The question for good men to ask themselves is: Is my goodness helping others? Is it a private luxury, or is it telling upon the City? [1]

3. We are trying to build *a State*. And what are the builders putting into it? Armaments and soldiers, ships and guns? Tariff defences and walls of retaliation? Are we emphasizing mere skill and push and cleverness? Is this all? Then we are rejecting the essential, and the nation will never stand. If the national structure is to be sound and strong and permanent, we must build Christ into our national ideals and policies and ambitions. 'But this is impossible!' That may be, but it is an impossibility which has never yet been tried. Would that some nation were daring enough to try the sublime experiment! Perhaps some day a people may be inspired by the Holy Ghost to risk its all upon the Lord. A time may come when even the very word 'retaliation' will be drummed out of our vocabulary. Let us build Christ into our laws, into the administration of our laws, into our treaties with kindred states, into all our dealings with inferior peoples. If we set this stone at nought we may find the Nemesis that awaits us in the desolations of imperial Rome.

¶ It is now being suggested that some memorial should be placed in the new Federal City of Canberra to the memory of Caroline Chisholm—a name honoured by all Australians for the great work she did for the State when emigration was new—establishing homes for young girl emigrants who had been sleeping literally on the rocks or any shelter they could find; inducing the British Government to adopt family colonization so that parents should not be forced to leave their children behind, and doing everything possible for the welfare of the many thousands she was the means of settling on the land. The historian Michelet wrote, 'Australia has but one saint, one legend, and that saint is a British woman.'

Let us come back to this all-important and primary question. In the building of our characters have we given the first place to the essential stone, or have we pushed Him aside? In all our planning and building is the Lord still despised and rejected? If so, let us realize our folly and begin anew.

[1] Henry Drummond.

None Other Name

Acts iv. 12.—'Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.'

'THERE is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.' This sentence at once invites and gathers round itself two thoughts. In the first place, its message is obviously that with which the Christian Church and its teachers set out in those early days to convince the world. They pointed men to Jesus as the Name above all others, the Divinely-sent Teacher and Redeemer of men. That was their gospel. They claimed for Him, not a place, but *the* place. They confronted an age which believed in bringing all the gods together, and in tolerating them all, and to that temper of mind they said, There is no other name but that of Jesus whereby we must be saved. Gibbon tells us that Alexander Severus, one of the Roman Emperors, placed in his domestic chapel the statues of Abraham, of Orpheus, of Apollonius, and of Christ, as an honour justly due to these respectable sages. That illustrates the real temper of Rome. Had the Christian people been willing to have Christ counted as just a 'respectable sage'; had they been satisfied to have their faith regarded as just one of various methods of doing homage to the Deity, Rome would have added Christ to its Pantheon, Christianity might have been an 'allowed religion,' and the Christian people would never have known a persecution. But Christianity was not satisfied with *a* place; it demanded the *whole* place.

The second thought is this. If we look at these words from the standpoint of to-day, they seem typical of what is commonly regarded as a narrower view of the Christian religion. The modern mind shrinks almost instinctively from the saying 'There is none other.' The age in which we live has toleration for one of its watchwords. In that respect it is strikingly similar to the world which confronted the Church at the beginning of her story. The Roman Empire had its temple of all the gods, whose doors were constantly open for the admittance of new forms of worship. And the age in which we live is disposed to regard generously new religious cults. We toy

with strange philosophies. There is hardly an ancient superstition which is without its representative in the modern world. Amid this medley the modern mind is content to dwell, plucking a flower of truth at random from different borders in the patchwork garden of faith. Partly, however, the spirit of tolerance is one of the sincere and serious things in our lives. That is the spirit of the age, and none of us is unaffected by it. We who believe in Christianity as the noblest religion cannot serve it by striking the harsh and intolerant note. We should not be true to ourselves if we did. The more we believe in our own faith the less can we deny to another its measure of truth and beauty and power.

The danger of this spirit of tolerance, however, is that we may so easily and completely miss the very thing which has made Christianity a power in the world. In allowing to other religions their measure of truth we may easily pass to the position that there is little or nothing to choose between them, that all religions are partial and flickering lamps lit from the central source. That road leads straight to a colourless indifference. It has led in our modern world to the large class of people who say, 'It doesn't matter what a man believes as long as he believes it intensely.' People who talk like that generally believe nothing at all themselves, or at least so little that they make no distinctive stand. To-day we are being forced back upon the enormous power for good or evil stored up in every real belief. It was only in a world where belief seemed to be a theoretical thing that men could say, 'It doesn't matter what you believe.' We see differently now, because there are beliefs abroad in the world which are fast making a wilderness of civilization. Believe in a falsehood, and life will inevitably become false. Jesus said, 'The truth shall set you free.' Truth is the only deliverer. The first message is, 'Believe . . . and ye shall be saved.' Yes, but believe in what? Truth? An abstract thing? That is not the answer of the gospel. No, believe in a Name. Not, of course, the Name itself, but all that the Name implies and stands for with regard to God and man and life.

¶ I'd like to do heaps of things really. But I don't mind if I do not do them. . . . Honesty (why?) is the only thing one seems to prize beyond life, love, death, everything. It alone remaineth. O you, who come after me, will you believe it? At the end *Truth* is the only thing *worth having*; it's more thrilling than love, more joyful and more passionate. It simply *cannot* fail. All else fails. I, at any-rate, give the remainder of my life to it, and it alone.[1]

The tremendous and exclusive claim which the Apostle here makes for Christ—that there is salvation in no other—needs strong and convincing reasons to justify it. Let us see, then, what exactly 'salvation' means. It is a very wealthy word, and consequently hard to define. But there are two main conceptions in the New Testament, and both must be included in any full or adequate idea of salvation. Let us call the one view the Johannine, and the other the Pauline. In St John's conception of salvation the main thing is the knowledge of God: 'This is eternal life, to know thee, the only true God.' In the Pauline conception it is deliverance from the pain and penalty and power of sin. Now the justification of the Apostle's claim is proved by this that it is only Christ who can give us the knowledge of God, and it is only Christ who can deliver us from sin.

1. It is only Christ who can *give us a saving knowledge of God*. This is the knowledge that concerns us most. This is the knowledge which none of us can do without. The counsel of the old Greek sage was, 'Know thyself.' The appeal of the Bible is, 'Know God.' When we turn our eyes within we see weakness and failure and lust and sin. We know—only too well—that in the course of justice none of us should see salvation. If we are to be saved at all, it must be, not on the strength of what we are, but on the strength of what God is. Therefore it becomes a life-and-death matter with us to know God—to know whether God is stern and harsh and pitiless, or kind and loving and merciful. And that essential and saving knowledge we get in Christ, and in no one else. Christ has shown us the Father, the Father of infinite love and pity, whose grace is more abundant even than our sin. That is the knowledge that saves and redeems, and that fills us with glorious and immortal hope. God is Love. And if you ask why only Jesus could give us this knowledge, the reply is, because Jesus is the Everlasting Son of the Father. Men could

[1] *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, 1914-1922.

only guess at God's nature. They got glimpses of His power and His wisdom and His holiness. They were looking at God, so to speak, from without. They were judging Him by His works and ways. But Jesus knew God from within. He knew God's heart. He was from eternity in the bosom of the Father. Only a Son could have revealed God as Father, and Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power by the Resurrection from the dead.

¶ 'Unlovely, nay frightful,' says Emerson, 'is the solitude of the soul which is without God in the world. And Romanes, the distinguished biologist, after he had felt compelled to stifle his old beliefs in the interest of what he then thought was the truth, confessed that 'with the virtual negation of God the universe to me has lost its soul of loveliness'; and later on, 'when at times I think of the appalling contrast between the hallowed glory of that creed which once was mine and the lonely mystery of existence as now I find it—at such times I shall ever feel it impossible to avoid the sharpest pang of which my nature is susceptible.'

2. It is only Christ who can *deliver us from the pain and penalty and power of sin.* 'Shew us the Father,' said Philip, 'and it sufficeth us.' Well, Christ did that for men. 'Father' was His new name for God. But there was an obstacle to the outflow of God's Fatherly pity and love, and that was sin. Sin had to be dealt with before man could be saved. And Christ dealt with it seriously and effectively: and by what He did then released men from that death which was sin's penalty, and set them right with God. The Cross was not a martyrdom. Not all the soldiers in Jerusalem could have taken their Prisoner had He wished to escape. For it was no mere man who hung and suffered there. It was the Holy Son of God. You must look back on the Cross from the vantage ground of Easter Day. It is only in the light of Easter you see its true significance. By that great atoning sacrifice of His, Christ set us free from the law of sin and death. But that is not all the Cross does. It not only cancels sin's guilt and frees men from its penalties; it also delivers men from its power. It really saves from sin itself. It breaks the bondage of evil habit. It purges our souls of passion and evil desire. The Cross is not simply a sacrifice offered in the past. It is a present dynamic in the life. These two mighty things Christ does for us—He delivers us from our sins; He gives us the spirit of sonship by which we cry, 'Abba Father.' The man who is 'loosed from his sins' and who knows God as a Father is a saved man. But it is through Christ alone that we get these blessings.

¶ Swami Vivekananda preaches to his fellow-countrymen the sinlessness of man: 'The worst lie that you ever told yourself was that you were a sinner or a wicked man. . . . It is the greatest of all lies that we are men; we are the god of the universe.' Meanwhile Krishna, the favourite god of India, is the incarnation of abandoned immorality. When some Hindus were remonstrated with for worshipping a being guilty of these shameless vices, they replied: 'These are but his sports, you English have your sports, you have the railway and the steamboat and the telegraph, and no one blames you. Why should you blame Krishna for sporting in *his* way?'[1]

Are we sure ourselves that there is no other name whereby we must be saved? It is the urgency of this conviction that we need to recapture. There is a light of God which is given to all men; there is a work of God in all the religions of the world. But there is a Christ who is the one Light and Life of men. Every gleam in the world is a reflection of His light, and only in the Christian revelation of the Word made flesh is there an answer to what the souls of all men are reaching out to attain. This note of the supremacy and exclusiveness of Christ has been the conviction behind all the great movements of the Christian life during the centuries. Men have ventured much in Christ's name because they believed that where there was no knowledge of Him life went hopelessly astray. Then let us ask ourselves if the Christ is the Name for us above all others? Is there that urgency in our own personal devotion and adoration? Do we bring the fire and passion of that belief into our praise and prayer and service? Can we say with Christina Rossetti:

None other Lamb, none other Name,
None other Hope in heaven or earth or sea,
None other hiding-place from guilt and shame,
None beside Thee.

[1] R. F. Horton, *The Trinity*, 201.

A Christ-ruled World

Acts iv. 12.—'For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.'

Is this too exclusive, too intolerant, a claim to make for Christ and Christianity? What right has Christianity to claim this supreme and exclusive place in the world, to set out to conquer the other religions and to obscure every other name by the glory of the name of Christ?

We might say, first, that we appeal to *the great commission of our Lord*, who, when He established the Church, said, in its charter, that it should go out into all the world and make Him known to every creature. But there are many, of course, who do not accede to the force of the great commission. They say that our Lord knew nothing about any of the great religions with which we are dealing to-day—that He may have known something of the Greek and Roman religion, but nothing of Buddhism or Hinduism. It is quite true that the world into which Jesus came was only the Greek and Roman and Jewish world, and that the great non-Christian world with which we have to deal to-day lay beyond its confines; but it did not lie beyond the confines of the significance of the Incarnation. The commission was given, to be sure, inside the Roman world; but the Incarnation happened with regard to the whole round world, and for Christian men and women that answer is quite sufficient. Jesus came into the world where every great religion that now exists was to be found, except Muhammadanism. And He came to the best of the old religions. Nobody would pretend to claim that any religion to-day can compare, either as a religion or as a great moral power, with Judaism, and yet it was to Judaism that Jesus Christ came. Those men and women who say we have no right to go out with Christianity and to attempt to displace and conquer the non-Christian religions do not have us to reckon with: they must reckon with God in the Incarnation. Once and for ever God set His estimate on the religious insufficiency of all that there was in the world when He sent His Son into it to bring what the world did not have, what the world was dead without.

Or we might appeal to *Christian experience*. We say that we have known Jesus Christ and that He is indispensable to human life; that, if our life cannot get along without Him, no more could any other human life dispense with Him, and by just as much as we have found Him to be not only sufficient but indispensable for our lives, by so much is He needed as the only sufficient and indispensable Saviour for the lives of men and women all over the world. Just here people may answer, 'Your experience is met by the experience of men and women in other religions.' They believe they have had just as real experience as Buddhists or as Muhammadans as we have ever had as Christians. So we cannot allege our experience of Christ as an answer to other minds as to why our religion in their view should be allowed to seek to make good its claim to all the world of men.

In this way we are driven to the answer that we have *compared our religion with all the other religions of the world*, and on the ground of what we find to be facts as well as of what we believe our commission calls us to do and of what our experience requires us to undertake, we are justified in seeking to make our religion the one religion of all the world. Let us consider the grounds on which we believe Christianity to be sufficient and unique.

1. *The good in other religions is found in purer and completer form in Christianity.*—That there is much living truth in the great non-Christian religions, nobody would attempt to deny. For at the beginning they were the efforts of earnest men in the dawn of human history to deal with the great problems of life. In Muhammadanism, the late comer, there is a noble assertion of the sovereignty of God. In Hinduism we find the truth of the immanence of God in human life—that He is not far away, that He is nearer to us even than our breathing. Buddhism declares the transitoriness of our human life—that all seen things are but for the moment, that the unseen things are eternal. In Confucianism is to be found the great assertion of the sacredness of all our human relationships, the unity of that bond which relates us to the life of the past and all the life that is to be. There is good in each one of the great non-Christian religions, but that good is distorted and unbalanced. It is true that Muhammadanism has the idea of the sovereignty of God; but it has no conception of God's Fatherhood. It is true that Hinduism has the

idea of the immanence of God; but it has no idea of God's holiness. It is true that Buddhism thinks of our human life as transitory; but it has no conception of the great truth that in this human life is the sphere where we are to do the will of God and achieve serviceable character. It is true that Confucianism sanctifies our human relationship; but it knows nothing of that great life which lies behind the veil of sense. Only Christianity gathers up into itself the good of all the religions of the world, balancing that good in just proportion, keeping it clear from all that is evil and obscuring and defiling.

¶ All, or very nearly all, of the beautiful rules and maxims of Buddha are to be found in the teaching of our Lord. But there is this difference between the faiths they preached. Whereas that of Buddha, as I understand it, is a religion of Death, holding up cessation of mundane lives and ultimate extinction as the great reward of virtue, Christianity is a religion of Life, of continued individual being, full, glorious, sinless and eternal, to be won by those who choose to accept the revelation of its Founder. Who, then, can hesitate between the two? Who wishes to be absorbed into the awful peace of Nothingnesss? [1]

2. *There is good in Christianity that is not to be found in any of the non-Christian religions.*—What are the three great elements that go to make up religion? In his little book on the religions of the world, Principal Grant quotes from one of the Hibbert lectures, to the effect that the three fundamental elements of religion are dependence, fellowship and progress. Every one of the non-Christian religions rests on the sense of dependence. They are afraid of the unseen powers, but ours is the only religion in the world that meets this deep longing of human hearts for fellowship with God and for steadily growing and unfolding life. It is the only religion that thinks of God as one, and holy, and good, and loving, and active. And if Christians have this God, are they not bound to seek to give that idea of God to all His children throughout all the world?

Of course, men's ideas of sin and of salvation depend upon their idea of God. Sin is anything contrary to the will of God; salvation is participation in the life of God. What we think, therefore, about sin and salvation will be immediately determined by our conception of God. Our ideas of righteousness and unrighteousness hang absolutely on the character of our thought of God, and Christianity separates itself by the width of the whole world from every other religion not only in its conception of God but in its idea of what sin is and of what salvation is.

The Christian idea of service likewise is a unique and exceptional thing. Buddha used to say, 'I am no man's servant.' Over against that set the characteristic word of Christianity, 'I am in the midst of you as one who serves.' Our idea of self-sacrifice, of self-surrender, of love, of working on behalf of those about us—each is unique and distinct in Christianity.

¶ Mr Basil Mathews tells this fine story of the work of a medical missionary in Mesopotamia. 'The life of a young Arab was at stake. He could only be saved by transfusion of blood from a healthy man. The doctor told the youth's family, and asked from which of them he could take the blood. Father, brothers, cousins, all refused to be lanced to give their blood even for their own kin. The white doctor saw one way only of saving the life. He took that way. He lanced his own body and gave his blood to save the young Arab. A window opened in the spirit of those watching Arabs. New light poured in. They were amazed. This was something that had never come into their lives before. From that day that doctor has been able to do what he will with those Arabs, and no man dare harm a hair of his head.' And Mr Mathews adds: 'The difference between the refusal of the Arabs and the readiness of the white man to pour out his blood for them was not the difference of race. It was the difference of lordship. It was the difference between Muhammad and Jesus Christ.' [1]

Christianity, too, is unique in its idea of personality and of character. There are some great non-Christian religions that have no ideal of personality at all. They do not conceive of the individual life as standing alone, as responsible by itself for a life in God. And, of course, having no ideal of personality, they can have no ideal of character, which is personality patterned after the perfect personality of Christ.

3. *Christianity is in kind different from all the other religions of the world.*—We have been speak-

[1] H. Rider Haggard, *The Days of My Life.*

[1] *Young Islam on Trek.*

ing of Christianity as though it were a religion just like the other religions, only superior to them. But that is entirely inadequate and misleading, for Christianity is not a religion at all in the sense in which these non-Christian religions are so described. Muhammadanism, for example, is the religion of a book; Buddhism is the religion of a method; Hinduism is the religion of a social system; Confucianism is the religion of a political philosophy. Now, Christianity has a Book, and a moral method; it indicates social ideals, and breeds political theories; but Christianity is not these things. It is interesting to note that Jesus Christ never used the word 'religion.' The idea of a religion as a body of information, as a method to be pursued in ethical behaviour, is nowhere found in the New Testament. Christianity is not a religion in that sense at all. Our Lord defined His religion as a living, personal relationship supernaturally construed. It is not only listening to a message spoken by a teacher who died; it is not trying to emulate the example of a great man who lived once and then passed away. That is not the sense in which Christianity is a personal relationship. It is so in the sense of binding our lives to-day with a great personal Life that is here to-day, the relating of our lives to God in Christ. In that way Christianity speaks in a language that no other religion ever thought of using, with ideas that are unique to it.

¶ Plato is not Platonism; Platonism might have been taught though its author had never lived. Mohammed is not Islam; the Koran itself would warn us against any such confusion between the teacher of its doctrine and the substance of the doctrine itself. But Christ Himself is Christianity; His teaching is inextricably bound up with His Person; and it is not merely because He taught what He did, but because He is what He is, that through Him we can come to the Father.[1]

¶ A Church Father of the second century, when the question was put to him, 'What new thing did the Lord bring by His coming?' replied, 'Know that He brought all newness in bringing us Himself.'

Other religions are at their best just the striving of man's heart after God. Some of them do not claim to be anything more than that. But Christianity is the quest of God after human hearts. It is the love of God come down to seek men. It is the Father's own Son become incarnate in order that He might find, as the Shepherd His sheep, and bring them home. So that those who are not willing, in obedience to the commission, in loyalty to their experience, in compliance with the simple facts that emerge from any study of the world's present religious life, to go with their faith to the rest of the world, are withholding the world's faith from the world. And how great the need to-day for a Christ-ruled world!

[1] Canon Liddon.

Boldness

Acts iv. 13.—'Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.'

THE text is one which rarely gets justice paid to it. We pray for love, we pray for meekness, we pray for holiness, and we pray that men may take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. Yet, when we look into this text, we see that it was none of these things in the disciples that reminded the enemies of Jesus that these men had been with Christ. What amazed the world was their *boldness*. 'When they saw the boldness of Peter and John . . . they marvelled.'

'Boldness!'—the word is suggestive not of any one particular element, but of a whole treasury of spiritual content. It means presence of mind. It means freedom of speech. It means outspokenness almost to the point of bluntness. The men whom the world was contemplating had nothing about them of the panic-stricken. Their words were not stammered in fearful uncertainty. They did not indulge in weak ambiguities. The outlines of their character and confession were not dim and broken like the lineaments of some hazy moor; they stood out, clear and decisive, like the carved sky-line of a mountain-range, or like the rocky headlands of a bold and well-defined coast.

1. This boldness was a phenomenon. The learned Rabbis could not fit it into any of the current explanations. It was clear that it was not the product of the schools. It was

not the fruit of culture. They 'perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men.' 'Unlearned!' Yes, that was most evident! Even their dress gave evidence of their illiteracy. They lacked the academic gown. They did not wear the imposing robe of the scribe. Why, even in their very attire, the contrast between them and the Rabbi was something like the contrast between a fisherman and an Oxford don! 'Unlearned!' Certainly; their accent betrayed them! The roughness of the provincial dialect still clung to their untutored tongues. And yet here the men stood, with fine spiritual serenity, with an unshaken strength of assurance, with a firm definiteness of thought, with an unwonted precision of speech, and a magnificent irresistibleness of life. Schooled or unschooled this had to be accounted for! Fisherman or Rabbi this character demanded explanation! Here was the simple meadow, but here too was the grand, out-jutting height of splendid crag! 'When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled.'

2. What was the explanation of this character which so perplexed the world? We must turn back to the eighth verse to find the secret. 'Then Peter, *filled with the Holy Ghost*.' That is the explanation of the boldness. It is Peter plus the Infinite! A man who is filled with God can be none other than bold. It is as natural for him to be bold as it is for others to be craven, as natural to be decisive as for others to be limp. But pause by the word 'filled.' The entire emphasis gathers there. It is a picturesque word. It was the word that was used when the net was crammed with fishes. It was the word that was used when all the holes were levelled up, and the way was made even and plain. It was the word that was used when a substance had been steeped and soaked in the dye, and every strand and thread in the fabric had received the requisite hue. And this word, with these large inclusive relationships, is the word used to describe the infilling of these men with the Spirit of God. They were filled with the Spirit like a crammed net. Every gap and lack in their being was levelled up by the Spirit, and the whole life was even and symmetrical. And every tissue and fibre in mind and heart and soul was steeped in the Spirit, and dyed into one all-pervasive and heavenly hue. 'Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost!' Is it any wonder that he was bold, and startled the onlooker?

Why are we not bold? Because the filling is only partial. Life has many faculties, and our trouble often is that some are filled, and some are unfilled with the Spirit of God. Sometimes the conscience is God-filled, but not the affections. Sometimes the emotions are consecrated, but not the reason and judgment. It is the partial filling that is the peril of the Christian life. It is the unfilled faculty that makes the indecisive life. It is the unhallowed relationship that makes the entire being limp and faint. We must be enveloped in the Holy Spirit, and allow every faculty and every relationship to be bathed in His gracious flood.

¶ A friend asked Sir H. B. Edwardes' biographer, 'Have you brought out Sir Herbert's *religious character*?'

The answer to this inquiry would be, that to tell the story of his life is to bring out his 'religious character,' for every subject that he touched he adorned with the spirit of holiness. His *life* was his *religion*, which with him was not a garment put on and worn on Sundays and saints' days or great occasions, but the *permeating influence of every action*. He had never been brought up in a religious school, he had been taught nothing of it as a child, he knew nothing of the forms and the mannerisms of it; perhaps this was one reason why everything he did was so simple, so original, and so earnest.[1]

3. There is great and peculiar need of this apostolic 'boldness' to-day. The times imperatively demand the military attitude in the soul. The Christian character must be conspicuous for strength, intelligence, decisiveness, attack. Whatever may be allowed to lie in obscurity, or hidden away in secret and mystical depths, the masculinity of Christian discipleship must stand out in bold and flaming relief. There is nothing in the might and majesty of the foe to make us dismayed, but we do need to fear a soft and limp and flaccid Christianity. How do we stand in the matter? Can we say that the great characteristic of our modern discipleship is its boldness, and that by the

[1] *Life and Letters of Major-General Sir Herbert B. Edwardes*, ii. 369.

very vim and pulse of our living we arrest the world in wonder? Is there not an effeminate streak in Christian character which is imperilling its robustness. Christian men and women of to-day do not sit down to the good, square, solid Biblical meals in which our fathers revelled in the generations past. We have fallen upon the days of scraps—everything has to be reduced to the tit-bit—and we ignore the firm and solid loaf. How can we expect robustness from such diet?

¶ Not long ago one of the great cities of our island was concerned with the softness of the children's limbs. Their limbs were threaded with bending gristle rather than with firm and well-knit bone. And what was the explanation? That the water they drank was too soft, destitute of the harder elements, lacking the lime which goes to the making of bone.[1]

'When they saw the boldness!' That is the character with which we must confront the world.

(1) We need to display *boldness of assurance.* Mark the bold and magnificent moral sense of these inspired apostles—'And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right!' Their conscience pealed out bold as thunder in the midnight. That is the peal which staggers the world. We must not muffle our consciences. We must not give them opiates, and sink them into a perilous sleep.

¶ You remember the story of James Guthrie, the sturdy old Covenanter and one of the martyrs of the seventeenth century. When he stood before his judges in Edinburgh he said: 'My lords, this old and broken body I do submit to you to do with it whatsoever you will, but, my lords, my conscience I cannot submit.'

¶ Again, I would dwell on the intensity of his moral convictions. They fairly gripped him. They not only inspired the born orator to a white heat of denunciation, carrying him doubtless now and again beyond the limits of his more leisured judgment, but made him fearlessly independent of prejudice, interests, or opposition.[2]

(2) And we need to display *boldness of will.* Look again at these Spirit-filled men. 'Let us straitly threaten them that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.' . . . '*We cannot but speak.*' How magnificent the response. They felt their wills to be caught in the sweeping current of the Infinite. They were impelled by a mighty imperative, constrained by an all-encompassing and irresistible necessity. 'We cannot but speak!' Martin Luther was not far away from apostolic ways when he, too, made similar response to similar threatenings. 'I can do no other, God help me!' That is the boldness we need in the warehouse, the shop, the office, the street, and the field. A temper like that, quiet, firm, bold, irresistible, would bewilder your antagonist and make him limp as water.

¶ 'My lads,' said Napoleon to a regiment of horse, 'you must not fear death: when soldiers brave death they drive him into the enemy's ranks.' And we, too, when we are bold and unflinching, send panic and confusion into the lines of the enemy. 'Be ye steadfast, unmovable.'

'They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.' That is imperfectly stated. It leaves out the essential secret. 'They had been with Jesus?' Nay, they *were* with Jesus! 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble. Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be shaken in the heart of the seas.'

Things Seen and Heard

Acts iv. 19, 20.—'But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'

WHAT had happened? 'A notable miracle!' There had been presented before the common perceptions of all the people a hard, invincible, obtrusive fact. The lame man had received strength in his feet and ankle bones, and he was 'walking and leaping and praising God.' 'We cannot deny it!' How has it happened? 'By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.' The relationship between the deed and the Master has been made abundantly clear, for the Apostle has declared it in definite and

[1] J. H. Jowett, *The Transfigured Church*, 189.
[2] G. W. E. Russell, *Basil Wilberforce*, 145.

unmistakable terms. And what has this 'notable miracle' accomplished? Has the world been convinced, and are the hearts of all men prostrate before the Lord? By no means. 'Let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.' Such is the answer of the world to a marvellous ministry of heavenly love.

'Let us threaten!' That is ever the miserable resource of the feeble world. As if threatening could accomplish anything! Sometimes it appears to be immediately effective, but ultimately it is impotent. You cannot suppress the things of the Spirit by the powers of the State. We used to be very busy threatening the Salvation Army, but its spiritual persistence vanquished its opponents and won the day. What is the answer of the apostles to the menaces of men? There is no fright, no yielding, no spirit of compromise. 'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'

Let us look at these Pentecostal men, and note upon what resources they fell back in the hour of stress and strain.

1. They fell back upon *the indestructible groundwork of their own experience.* 'The things which we have seen and heard.' When they were confronted by the threats of men, they stood in the strength of their own experiences. The things which they had seen and heard in Jesus! Let us remember it is Peter who is speaking, but Peter with a memory quickened and inspired by the Holy Ghost. His remembrance of his past intercourse and fellowship with the Lord is being refurbished, and he is living it all over again. Peter recalled the glory of the Transfiguration, the dark, cold season of Gethsemane, the colder dawning on the day of denial, his Master's look, which smote his heart into bitter tears, the awful scene of Calvary, and the love-look from the Cross! He remembered the empty grave, the meeting with the risen Lord, the searching question, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?' and the wonderful grace by which he had been received again into the confidence of his Lord. What were the threats of men in the face of experiences like these? Peter was rendered invincible when he thought of the 'things which we have seen and heard.' We cannot share the Apostle's experiences in the flesh; it is not our privilege to be the earthly companions of the King as He walks the way of the Cross. But we can be His friends in the spirit, and even now there are wondrous things to be 'seen and heard.' The trouble is that we do not listen to Him, we do not give time to contemplate Him. It is possible so to gaze upon the suffering Jesus that our very bones feel some of the ache and tiredness of His crucified body. It is possible so to gaze upon the glory of the risen King that the 'power of His resurrection' works in our spirits with mighty and purifying grace. It is the grand and largest resource of tempted and threatened men to fall back upon their spiritual resources, the secret things of the spirit, 'the things seen and heard.'

There were also the things which the apostles had seen and heard in themselves. Had not Peter witnessed a change in his own life? Men cannot go through these profound transformations and not know it. When a man has passed out of timidity into boldness, out of cowardice into fearlessness, he is not unmindful of the change. When the chill twilight of a man's uncertainty has passed into the sunny light of confident hope, the man is just as conscious of it as he who has passed from the cold and shady side of the street to the side that is bathed in noontide sun. It is a grand thing to fall back upon the miracles that have been wrought in our own life, and, when we are faced by the antagonisms of men, to recapitulate 'the things which we have seen and heard.'

¶ Forty years in the wilderness with a murmuring people, and at the end the promised land fading away like a mirage in the desert! What kept Moses up? It was the memory of that 'burning bush.' Yes, whenever his spirit grew faint and weary, he went back in memory to that wondrous day. Once again he saw the unconsuming fire. Once again he heard the voice of God quivering through the silence of that lonely desert, and in a moment the feeble knees were strong again, and with a new courage he grasped his shepherd's staff, and went forth to meet the inevitable tasks and trials of the day.[1]

And there were the things which they had seen and heard in others. How John would wonder at the transformation of Peter, and how

[1] W. M. Mackay.

Peter would wonder at the wonderful ripening of John! And they would be both equally startled at the marvellous illumination and warming of the doubtful Thomas. This is another way to meet the hostility of the world, to remember the Lord's dealings with our fellows. 'Things which we have seen and heard.' In all these ways let us fall back upon the indestructible groundwork of our experience. When the world seeks to oppose our advance let us recall the miracles of Pentecost.

¶ Franz Delitzsch, scholar and saint, says of himself: 'In the Muldenthal I was, as a young man, a witness of spiritual struggles and triumphs. Still does my life find its root in the soil of that first love. Still to me is the reality of miracles sealed by the miracles of grace which I saw with my own eyes in the congregations of that blessed valley.' [1]

2. The apostles fell back upon *the commanding sense of Divine right.* 'Whether it be right in the sight of God.' Where did they form their sense of right? 'In the sight of God.' There are two ways of ascertaining the right. We can hearken unto men or we can hearken unto God. The man who merely hearkens unto men will find that his sense of right becomes dull and obtuse. If our sense of right is to remain discriminating and acute we must take our consciences to the One who made them, and have them daily re-made. We must form our judgments 'in the sight of God.' Whenever we take ourselves into the Lord's presence we bring our souls under a chastening and refining ministry. Our moral instruments are re-tuned; we set our clock by Greenwich! When these men threatened, the Apostle consulted his grace-set sense of right. By the judgment of that great tribunal he took his determined stand.

¶ Conscience requires not only to be listened to, but to be trained. It needs a teacher and an ally. We are here only on safe ground when we realize, as Quaker Barclay puts it in his Apology, 'that Christians are to be led inwardly and immediately by the Spirit of God, even in the same manner, though it befall not many to be led in the same measure, as the saints were of old.' [2]

3. And now, with this great work of experience, and this sense of well-defined right, it is not surprising that the apostles had a third characteristic. They felt the holy and gracious necessity of *witnessing for the Lord.* 'We cannot but speak.' They spoke as naturally as they breathed. It was not so much deliberative as instinctive. Their experiences were so full that their speech became the natural vehicle of their souls. Whoever has a real, personal experience of Christ's saving power, and has heard and seen Him, will be irresistibly impelled to impart what he has received. The word concealed in the prophet's heart burned there 'like fire in his bones, and he was weary of forbearing.' So it always is with deep conviction. If a man has never felt that he must speak of Christ, he is a very imperfect Christian. The glow of his own heart, the pity for men who know Him not, his Lord's command, all concur to compel speech. The full river cannot be dammed up.

[1] A. Smellie, *In the Hour of Silence*, 241. [2] J. Brierley.

Over Forty!

Acts iv. 22.—'For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.'

'THE man was above forty.' That was the wonder of it. The man was healed in the midst of his days. When our life crosses a certain line we regard the forces of recuperation as reduced. Our resources have become scantier, and reactive energies begin to lose their vitality. Painful witness is borne to this in the pathetic heading we sometimes find in the daily Press. A man is out of employment, and because he is 'above forty' he finds it hard to secure a place. He is looked upon as one whose youthful forces are partly spent, as one who can no longer give to a position the fruitful devotion of youth. His day is partly over. His chances are gone. And we sometimes reason in similar ways concerning the life of the spirit. When life attains to a certain age we regard its habits as finally fixed, and nothing short of a miracle can alter a man's course and disposition. In the earlier days life is still fluid and can be poured from mould into mould, and can assume a changing shape. But when forty is past, the hope of transformation grows very faint and we come to regard a man as settled in his self-appointed destiny. But the miracle reported in the Acts is intended to symbolize a greater miracle still.

It typifies that spiritual transformation which can be worked upon men even when their lives are established in rigid habits. There are none too old for the ministries of grace. And yet we must not lose sight of the great truth that the best time to enter into covenant with the Lord is in the period of habit-formation, and not when habit has been fixed by the ill practices of the years.

Let us think of some of the dangers that we are likely to meet as we grow older.

1. There is the danger of *losing the ministry of an active wonder*. Everybody recognizes how large a part wonder plays in the opening life of a child. We have only to look at the large, open eyes to find what place wonder fills in the awakening spirit. Then comes the time of budding intelligence and of unfolding powers. Dumb inquiry becomes an eager questioning. Passive wonder changes into a quenchless curiosity. The child has a voracious longing to look behind the surface into the insides of things. He begins to turn his toys inside out, he clutches the keys and seeks to turn the locks of doors which lead to hidden secrets. That early wonder becomes appeased; the child no longer breaks his toys, he begins to make them; and the wonder passes on to other fields. Then there comes a day when the early wonder ripens into reverence and awe. He passes into the realm of hero-worship. His heroes may be rude and primitive; but the devotion will soon mature and will pass from the louder heroisms of the Old Testament to the quiet and nobler chivalry of the New Testament, and will eventually centre on Jesus and the Cross. Now this wonder and this reverence and this awe are forces of immeasurable power, and we are apt to lose them as we grow in years, and with the loss of the recreative forces of life we are proportionately impoverished. There comes a day when with us it may be true, 'When we see him there is no beauty that we should desire him.'

¶ William Clissold, in Wells' new novel, says: 'There was a time when my little soul shone and was uplifted at the starry enigma of the sky. That has gone; gone absolutely. I could not have imagined that it would ever go. While I was still a little fellow at Mowbray, I remember looking at the stars one night upon the terrace—it must have been a night in winter, because Orion was there—and I was in an ecstasy. I was rapt in a passion of wonder. I was lost to all other feeling. . . . But now I can go out and look at the stars, as I look at the pattern on the wallpaper of a railway station waiting-room. About them I have become prosaically reasonable. If they were not there, there would be something else as casual, indifferently sublime. The more I have learnt about them, the more coldly aloof from me they become.' [1]

2. There is the danger of *disappointment*, the shattering of early dreams. When the visions and ideals of youth are put to the touchstone of reality, how dreadfully commonplace and monotonous life may seem! How seldom are the promises of youth quite fulfilled! The ideals we cherish prove hard of realization.

¶ 'Wait till I'm a man,' J. M. Barrie as a small boy used to say to his mother, 'and you shall lie on feathers.' As a mere boy he dreamed of conquering the world and winning comfort for her he loved the best. But it is not every man that succeeds as Barrie has done. Most of us find the world a harder thing than we thought.[2]

Perhaps things have gone awry! Perhaps the man at his business finds he has mistaken his calling! Perhaps the woman in the home finds work unending and monotonous, and trouble never far from the door! When the way stretches on and on, like a long white ribbon over a tiresome plain, and things never seem to be out of the bit, can we wonder that there are moments when some despair? To all such we must say, Go back to the well-spring of life itself. See even your drudgery and your trouble through Christ's eyes! That will give the dryest routine a new meaning.

3. There is the danger of *the closed mind*. People of a certain time of life get to live in ruts, and judge everything by settled stereotype standards. When disturbed from their set ways they are irritable, and when faced with new views they are inclined to be ungenerous. Their golden age is the past: they forget that God's great world rolls on. It is good to have a conviction, but never a prejudice. Let us

[1] H. G. Wells, *The World of William Clissold*.
[2] J. D. Jones.

beware of the shut mind: it is so easy to acquire. If you cannot accept, be charitable to new views. Give Christ's own welcome to everything that is good, even though it be novel. Because a thing has been done for a thousand years, it does not follow that it should be done now. Religion is often hampered because our eyes are in the past, instead of in the future. In church, social, or business life, be not hidebound by traditions, however good.

¶ 'To-day is not yesterday,' says Carlyle; 'we ourselves change; how can our works and thoughts, if they are always to be the fittest, continue always the same? Changes indeed are painful, yet ever needful; and if memory have its force and worth, so also has hope.'

¶ Dr Clifford once confessed that the greatest fear of his life was lest he should become an old fogey. 'An old fogey,' he said, 'is a man who has closed his mind.' 'There are old fogies,' he added, 'of twenty-five.'

¶ It was when Mansoul fell that old crabbed Mr Prejudice, with sixty deaf men under him, was set to guard Eargate. And it was that sinister guard that was the crucifixion squad that day Christ died, their hands that pushed Him forward, that laid Him on the Cross, that ran the spear into His side—'old, angry, ill-conditioned Prejudice,' and his deaf ears and his inhospitable heart.[1]

4. There is the danger of *moral compromise*. When people depend on others for their work, they begin to discover that it is not politic to have strong views. Many men of middle age, with the anxieties of home on their hearts, have learned to peel and prune their opinions to suit others, and wait to see which way the wind will blow! We all value discretion, but discretion is a poor makeshift for honour. There is a danger of moral compromise among many middle-aged people in the press of modern competitive life. With the thought of their future before them and the reminder of wife and children at home, they will undertake certain of the shadier types of work which they would have spurned in their youth. Scruples are apt to seem far-fetched things under such pressing temptations. It gives one a sore heart to think of a man placed in any such temptation. God forgive the society that makes it possible. Let us seek in our work to be true to the light and truth of Jesus, to be true although we suffer, and to live the doctrine which we profess.

5. Again, there is the danger of the *material mind*. Young people, at times, have enough poetry and grace in them to risk all for a Divine hazard. But when the ties of life are about us, we worship what we call common sense. And common sense suggests that it is the duty of a man to work for his living, to be keenly interested in his business, to lay by money for a rainy day, to try to succeed in his vocation, and to value position and fame. These are all quite good things in themselves, and not to be undervalued. But there is a danger. We are only too apt to become absorbed in material concerns, perhaps insensibly, until we judge all things, even our fellow-men, by the things they possess. It is pitiful to see a good man's mind becoming lowered, earthened, crusted, by unspiritual aims. This is the special danger of a *prosperous* middle age. 'Man shall not live by bread alone.' There is nothing in life that will ever repay us for the loss of the spiritual mind and the inmost fellowship of Jesus.

¶ As a young man Edouard Frère was discovered by Ruskin, who compared his colour with Rembrandt's, affirmed of him that he 'painted with his soul,' and combined the depth of Wordsworth, the grace of Reynolds, and the holiness of Angelico. In those early days his work was full of simplicity and sincerity, then its qualities began to fade, and although they still show talent, the 'soul' has departed from them. Instead of sincerity we have affectation, a 'wallowing in the pathetic,' and an appeal for popular appreciation through the adoption of a shallow sentimentalism. What produced this degeneracy in his art? The answer is that for twenty years he sold himself to a Brussels dealer. He put wealth, popularity, success before his art; he made the world his god. It rewarded him with such gifts as the world can give, but wrote upon his pictures the shame of his life.[1]

These are some of the dangers that visit us with the years, and they are hostile to our manhood, and our growth and peace.

What shall we say then? Surely, first of all, we may say that it is infinitely the best thing to close with Christ early. 'They that seek

[1] A. J. Gossip, *The Galilean Accent*, 126.

[1] J. Burns.

me early shall find me.' Turn your wonder and your love upon Him in the earliest days, and from the earliest days you shall be satisfied.

But what of those from whom youth has passed, and upon whom these hostile forces are waging incessant war? Can the miracle of redemption be wrought? The Scriptures just laugh in ecstatic joy as they declare the possibilities of the old. 'Your old men shall dream dreams.' The dream time shall be given back again to life, the instinct for poetry, ideal, romance. 'They shall bring forth fruit in old age.' And how shall it all be done? By the renewing efficacy of the Christ of God. In the presence of His redeeming grace no one is 'too far gone.' 'Lord, he hath been dead four days already.' The miracle was impossible! 'Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldst believe thou shouldest see the glory of God?' Christ and the man in his prime must come together and the miracle shall be worked.

The Test of Liberty

Acts iv. 23.—'And being let go, they went to their own company.'

Peter and John had been made prisoners by the officers of the Sanhedrin, and been brought before the rulers and elders and scribes. That was a tribunal that might have silenced any men trained in Jewish prejudices; but it had no effect upon the prisoners except to fill them with a stronger conviction of the righteousness of their cause, and with a bolder courage than ever before. How well they stood this test before the Council! Dared to speak in Christ's name, they made answer that they dared not be silent. Threatened with every sort of dark and terrible fate, they had a fear in their hearts which made them proof against all other fear.

But the two apostles had another test to pass through—the hour of liberty when the long strain was over and they stood in the street once more. They were free to go where they liked and to do what they chose—and they went to their own company. In its own way this was a revelation of the sincerity of their faith. It was a declaration of their secret souls. It revealed where their treasure was, and the things they valued most in life. Where did they go? They went to Stephen the martyr, and Mary of Bethany, and Matthew the publican, and all the rest of that band of shining spirits—the very aristocracy of Christ. Could there be a clearer picture of the kind of men they were than this? When they let them go, they went to their own company.

1. To-day we think much of, and speak much of, liberty. All the currents of our time are flowing in the direction of a freer life, fewer hours of labour, less bondage of convention, less restrictions of any kind. One after another, the old conventions are breaking. People have different ways of looking at this drift toward liberty. Some are afraid of it; they look on it as a danger. Others look on liberty as a glorious privilege, and a positive good in itself whatever it may lead to. For the moment let us look on liberty as this incident suggests—a test of character, a gift which reveals, as nothing else can do, the kind of men and women we are. The hours of freedom are the searching, self-revealing hours of life. What we do then, think then, seek then, shows us what we are. When we are let go, we go to our own company.

(1) To begin with, the hour of liberty from labour is a self-revealing hour. No one will deny that, looking at a man's work, you can tell something about him. Character shows itself in the way we work and the kind of work we do. Slipshod work means shoddy character. Thorough work means a patient soul.

¶ Ruskin in his *Stones of Venice* describes a statue high up in a Venetian church, which to the outward eye was finished with exquisite skill; but if you climbed up to examine it more closely you had a rude shock, for the back of the statue, hidden from the spectator's eye, was left in its rough state—the work of a man who wrought only for appearances and cared little for the best. But ten years later, as Ruskin tells, having looked up the records, that man was banished from the city for forgery. There was a flaw in his character which ran all through.

A man's personality is a unity. 'The heart,' says Emerson, 'cannot be hid.' Is there a streak of baseness somewhere about a man, is there a vein of gold among the dross, then it will run all through like a stratum in the rocks. You will meet it cropping up in his home life, in his friendships, in his worship, if you can look deep enough; but the place where that streak of baseness or that vein of gold will show

up most is the hour of leisure. When the clock strikes six, where does the mind travel, where do the feet begin to move? What are the pleasures we naturally seek when we are absolutely free to use time as we please? What kind of thoughts do we think in the off-hours when we have no need to concentrate on the business in hand? What friends do we seek, and, having found them, what is the trend of conversation when there is no absorbing topic of the moment? Does it run up or down? These things are judging us, showing us, if we will only open our eyes, something, at least, of the kind of men and women we are at heart.

¶ I remember once buying a book of poems which had evidently lain long in some old library before it found its way into the mingled tray outside the bookseller's shop. Throughout, the poems had been marked, probably by some dead hand. It was easy, so far, to reconstruct the mind that once had perused the lines. A wholesome mind it must have been. Every unexpected phrase, every courtly turn of words, every dainty image and fancy had been lined for remembrance. It was a pleasure to think of this charming gentleman of the older school, possessed of a grace and dignity that now are lost, dwelling with delight on the daintiness of the poet. Some time afterwards I happened to be in a public library and took up a volume of the same poet for reference. Here was marking again. But what a different world this second reader lived in from the first. All that was unlovely, all that could set the machine of imagery working corruptly was emphasized, every morsel of naughtiness was set aside for future rolling on the palate. This man, too, we might know. He was one making a companionship of the base; and, while he sought that friendship, no efforts and no sudden fears could change the sure degrading of his mind. Whenever he was set free he would go to his own place, until it became his prison, from which there was no escaping.[1]

(2) Or again, character is tested and revealed by the things men do when the leading strings of youth fall off. The day comes when a young man leaves home. He has to face the world now on his own resources, and the day of authority and of command is over. It is in such a time, when the restraints are gone which were the safety and the strength of home, that a man steadily goes to his own company. What were the thoughts that were smouldering and burning under the gentle but firm constraint of home? It is not their liberty that wrecks men—what we call wreck is often revelation—it is the kind of life which they have led in secret before the hour of liberty arrives. The bonds of authority are broken now. There is no will to consult but a man's own. So, being let go, men go to their own company.

2. Now it may be said we have been speaking of liberty as a *perilous* thing, and some one may ask why it should have been looked upon as so *precious*. Why have men been willing to suffer and die for it? Why has the whole urge of noble manhood carried us out toward wider liberties? Why has God Himself inspired these struggles for liberty?

(1) In the first place, the hour of liberty is precious because it is the hour of self-determination. It is the hour of the making of manhood and womanhood. The old beautiful story in the first chapters of Genesis tells of the gift of liberty God gave to man at his birth. He made him free of all the trees in the garden except one, but He put no fences round that tree; man could eat of it if he chose. And why were there no fences there? Because only through choice, through the crisis of decision, through the freedom to take his own way, could man rise into manhood and struggle into power. No man can grow into manhood save by the struggle and the travail of great decisions made by himself and for himself, in the lonely spaces of his own unfettered soul.

The things we do in this perilous and precious hour of liberty make or mar us. It is the worship to which we give ourselves in the freedom of our aspiration, the prayers that start out of the heart's agony, though they be but a sob, that bring us the peace and the power of God's presence. An old writer on liberty, when the first glory of religious freedom began to dawn in England, set down his reason for religious toleration. 'I may grow rich by a word I take no delight in. I may be cured of some diseases by medicines I have no faith in; but I cannot be saved by a religion I detest or a ritual I abhor.' There is no real goodness which does not come from the good will. Christ

[1] J. R. P. Sclater, *The Sons of Strength*, 49.

Himself refuses a love which is forced, an allegiance which is not free; in point of fact there is no such thing.

(2) But there is another reason for the preciousness of liberty. It is God's faith that if a man be free—really free—there is something in him deeper than anything else, something in the very centre of his being which will start out and lead him straight to God. Take it for granted; a man is not at home till he has found his home in God. And the hour when bonds break and he is alone, unfettered, brings the awaking of home-sickness.

¶ Dr Benjamin Kidd tells the story of a young cuckoo which he had tamed and kept in his house. When the time for migration came he noticed that the bird became restless, flapped its wings ceaselessly and looked as if it were in a trance. 'It was one of the strangest sights,' he says, 'that I have ever witnessed—this young migratory creature of the air, which had never been out of my house and which had never known any of its kind, sitting beside me in the gloom of our northern winter, and by a kind of inherited imagination flying thus through the night, league-long over lands and oceans that it had never seen.'

Nothing can finally force a creature—man or beast—to be content with an alien bondage. Some day in the hour of freedom it will seek its own, or long to seek it, with a longing which nothing in its sheltered surroundings can quite repress. Hawthorne has a weird story of a birthmark which marred the face of a very beautiful woman. She married a husband who adored her, and to make her still more beautiful he sought and found a chemical which would remove the birthmark. He used it and the mark disappeared like the stain of the rainbow fading out of the sky; but that day the woman died. A strange tale! What does it mean? We can make our own interpretation. It might suggest that in the most perfect attachment, for the discipline of our forbearance, there is always something which love has to live down—some imperfection to make us love one another, as Mrs Browning puts it,' for love's sake only,' and not for some pretty touch of manner or surface beauty. But on the other hand, it might suggest that on every one of us there is a birthmark, the mark of our origin in God, and you cannot remove that mark without destroying the man himself. Deeper than the stain of sin, deeper than any pressure of tyranny to slay or smother, it belongs to us; and it is God's faith for us, that in the hour of freedom we shall seek and find our own in God.

Here, then, is the safeguard of liberty—to see it in this light. All liberty is God's gift—our free hours, our free lives, the freedom which is our heritage to-day. Freedom is God's trust; and His purpose, by the gift of it, is to draw our lives to Him. In point of fact, our only real freedom is the freedom to choose our master; and only as we choose God for our Master do we keep our liberty.

We are all kings in the kingdom of our king.
Were it not so, how could we hope in our heart
to meet him!
We do what we like, yet we do what he likes:
We are not bound with the chain of fear at the
feet of a slave-owning king.
Were it not so, how could we hope in our heart
to meet him!
Our king honours each one of us, thus honours
his own very self.
No littleness can keep us shut up in its walls of
untruth for age.
Were it not so, how could we hope in our heart
to meet him!
We struggle and dig our own path, thus reach
his path at the end.
We can never get lost in the abyss of dark night.
Were it not so, how could we hope in our heart
to meet him![1]

Ananias and Sapphira

Acts v. 1, 2.—'But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.'

One of the most striking features of the early Christian Church was what we have come to know as Christian Communism, or as the historian describes it in Acts iv. 32: 'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.' It is a bright and a pleasing picture that is thus presented. Nor is it difficult to understand how such a spirit should arise among men whose hearts were full to overflowing with the

[1] Rabindranath Tagore.

new Christian graces of brotherhood and peace. For we must not imagine that there was anything compulsory about this communism. It was entirely voluntary, and was due to the eager desire on the part of the wealthier members of the Church to do all that they could for their poorer brethren. In this particular alone we can at once see how widely it differed from what is generally known as communism or socialism in the present day. The spirit of much at any rate of our present-day socialism—so the distinction has been cleverly drawn—is, 'What is thine, is mine': but the spirit of those early believers was rather, 'What is mine, is thine.'

The wealthy part of the Church was no doubt made up of two classes: men who were full of the new spirit, and so hearty in the cause of Jesus that they were forward of their own accord to put all they had into the Church treasury, in order that no lover of Jesus might lack; and men honest enough in their belief, only less enthusiastic or generous, who gave, partly indeed from goodwill, but partly also through the force of example or the fear of censure. To whatever extent this latter class existed, it formed a dangerous element. When high-pitched virtue becomes a fashion, men learn to pay to it the homage of hypocrisy.

Of these two classes the writer of the Book of the Acts presents us with individual examples—of the former class, in the case of Joseph, or Barnabas, a wealthy Cypriot, who 'having a field, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet'; of the latter, in the case of Ananias with Sapphira his wife, whose melancholy story is now before us.

1. 'The corruption of the best becomes the worst': so says the proverb, and in the story of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira we have abundant corroboration of its truth. For both must, in the first instance at any rate, have been of a sufficiently generous character.

Ananias had seen what was going on around him, and he had determined that he must not be behindhand in the ministry of love. But ambition to stand well with his fellow-members evidently mingled with the pure spirit of charity, though we do not need to suppose that there was as yet any conscious intention to deceive. Acting, then, on these somewhat mixed motives of charity and ambition, Ananias determined to sell a possession, some farm or other which he had, and hand over the money to the apostles. He probably meant at first to hand over the whole price, but with the money in his hand the demon of avarice entered into his heart. And he 'kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.'

The sin of Ananias, then, lay in this, that he gave a certain sum as if it were the whole. There was no necessity for his giving either the whole or the part. Had he hung back, when others were selling their possessions, he would have been pronounced ungenerous in comparison with them. Had he brought a part, making no mistake about it that it was only a part, when they were giving all, then he would have been not so generous. But when he brought a part as if it were the whole, he added to his former selfishness and avarice deceit and hypocrisy. If he did not in so many words tell a lie, he did what was equally heinous, he *acted* a lie.

It is only when we thus clearly realize the enormity of Ananias's sin that we can understand the reason of the dreadful doom that followed. 'And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down, and gave up the ghost.' The judgment came not from men, but from God. As it was in God's sight—the sight of the living and heart-searching God—that the sin had been committed, so it was by the direct 'visitation of God' that it was now punished.

Nor was the awful lesson yet over. Three hours had scarcely elapsed since the young men had carried forth her husband, and buried him, when Sapphira, 'not knowing what was done, came in.' 'And Peter answered unto her'—answered her look of amazement as she regarded the awe-struck faces of those present—'Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?' 'Yea, for so much,' she replied, adhering to the unholy compact into which she and Ananias had entered, and adding deceit in speech to his deceit in act. 'Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and they shall carry thee out.'

It was the first intimation the unhappy woman had received of Ananias's death: and to the shame of her own consciousness of guilt must have been added the feeling that she had a

certain responsibility in what had befallen him. A word of remonstrance on her part might, at the beginning, have prevented the crime: it was too late now. 'Then she fell down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.' And as the sacred historian again impressively adds, showing how deep was the effect produced: 'And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things.'

¶ Nemesis is lame, but she is of colossal stature, like the gods; and sometimes, while her sword is not yet unsheathed, she stretches out her huge left arm and grasps her victim. The mighty hand is invisible, but the victim totters under the dire clutch.[1]

2. Scripture authority, including that of our Lord Himself, represents man as set betwixt a twofold world of invisible moral influences. The heart of man is as it were a little city or fortress on the borderland between two nations at war with each other, and liable to be captured by whichever at that point proves itself the stronger. But at the same time with this great difference, that every man has the power of deciding into whose hands he is to fall. His will is free; and he is personally accountable for whom he may choose as master.

St Peter, while tracing the fall of Ananias to the agency of Satan, yet prefixes his question with a *why*: 'Why hath Satan filled thine heart?' There had been a time when resistance was still possible. Ananias might have rejected the suggestion of the tempter; he was not bound to yield—but he had yielded. And very suggestive of why he had fallen so low is that other word 'filled.' It brings before us the quiet, gradual manner in which evil takes possession of the heart of man. We have seen already that it was so in the case of Ananias. Ambition to stand well in the sight of others was his first step; to ambition was afterwards added avarice; and then ambition and avarice combined led to deceit and hypocrisy. Or, as bringing out the same truth of the gradual progression of sin, notice how Ananias apparently first *thought* over the sin in his own heart; then *spoke* of it to his wife, and agreed with her that it could be done; and then how together they *carried it out*. Thought, speech, action—how often are these the successive links by which a man is led on from one degree of sin to another. The lesson is surely to resist at the very outset; so much depends upon the first step. We must not give place to even the first thought of evil, or listen to the tempter's whisper, whisper he ever so softly. How many, as they look back upon a downward career, can trace its beginning to some idle or vain thought, or to some hasty or careless word!

¶ There is a legend of the Buddha that after his great Act of Renunciation he was followed into his retreat by the tempter Mara (as 'a shadow followeth the body' runs the tradition), and that Mara said, 'If he but think a lustful, malicious, angry thought I shall be his master.' What can be less substantial than a thought? What foothold is there in a thought? Yet Mara was sure of sovereignty and conquest in the soul of the Buddha if the Enlightened one could only be induced to think evil.[1]

¶ First there cometh to the mind a bare thought of evil, then a strong imagination thereof, afterwards delight and evil motion, and then consent.[2]

3. With the final fate of Ananias and Sapphira we have nothing whatever to do. Only the time, the place, and the manner of their death were meant for the teaching of the Church—as a protest that the Holy Ghost is in her, and as a warning against hypocrisy. To be false in their hearts, and to thrust this falsehood into their religious worship and pretended service of God in His Church, was the offence for which they died.

The terrible severity of the punishment can be understood only by remembering the importance of preserving the young community from corruption at the very beginning. Unless the vermin are cleared from the springing plant, it will not grow. As Achan's death warned Israel at the beginning of their entrance into the Promised Land, so Ananias and Sapphira perished that all generations of the Church might fear to pretend to self-surrender while cherishing its opposite, and might feel that they have to give account to One who knows the secrets of the heart, and counts nothing as given if anything is surreptitiously kept back.

[1] George Eliot, *Janet's Repentance.*

[1] E. Cornwall-Jones. [2] Thomas à Kempis.

Unconscious Influence

Acts v. 15.—'They brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them."

This story of the superstitious reverence for the persons of those whom God was using in His service, though not at all in keeping with the desire of the Apostle, is a legitimate illustration of the undisputed truth of life's unconscious influence. For just as the shadow of Peter fell, all unconsciously to himself, upon those who were laid in his pathway, so are we always influencing, either for good or for evil, those with whom we are coming into necessary contact day by day, and who are, by means of our lives, being impressed in some degree either toward the love and service of Jesus Christ or away from Him.

1. Now, influence is of a twofold sort. It is either voluntary or involuntary, either the more or less conscious outcome of our considered activities or the entirely unconscious impression which our character makes upon others. The one is the product of exertion, the other is the natural outcome of existence. The former may be spasmodic and entirely uncertain in its effect, varying according to the nature and degree of our service. The fact of its reality is, however, a call to men to do good and to direct all the powers of their lives toward the doing of that which shall bless and beautify the lives of others. But our unconscious influence is the result not of what we do, but of what we are, and hence is unvarying, certain in its effect, and full of power. Of the two it is certainly by far the greater; for what a man is always counts more than what he does, just as Nature's silent forces are her strongest.

¶ To-morrow morning I mean to take Luke xi. 1, and preach on Unconscious Influence. The Disciples saw their Lord praying, and asked to be taught. So also St Peter went straight to the sepulchre, and St John, who had hesitated before at the door, went in after, indirectly and unconsciously influenced by that act. All life is a history of the power of involuntary unconscious influences. Our conscious influence is the result of intention, and on the whole does little; but our unconscious influence is the aggregate result of our whole character, manifesting itself in words, looks, acts that are not meant to effect anything, but which inevitably mould others. Our conscious and intentional influence may fail or may be false, but our involuntary is inevitable, and every moment operative, and must be true.[1]

A man's shadow is the result of his position with regard to the sun. Similarly, the influence of a man's character is entirely conditioned by his relationship to the Sun of Righteousness. What he is toward Jesus Christ determines also what he is toward men, for relationship with Christ controls the quality of his entire life. And just as in the sunlight a shadow is silently cast without the putting forth of any effort and is often quite unnoticed by the man whose shadow is cast, so in the nature of the case is our unconscious influence. It is silent, effortless, and unavoidable, and falls either this way or that upon all who are in our pathway. On this account every man is responsible for the kind of unconscious influence he is continuously exerting. The fact of its inevitableness involves us in the duty of determining its worthy quality, for as a shadow always follows a man, so his unconscious influence is always operating and its effect always abides. The Christian is never 'off duty.'

¶ One night at the college where I studied a senior was crossing the yard. It was late and he had spent his evening in a wretched debauch. He was feeling spotted and ashamed. As he crossed the campus he looked up and saw the oldest and best beloved member of the faculty sitting at his desk busily writing under the glow of an evening lamp. The young fellow knew that the old man was at work upon something which he believed would be useful to the world. And the contrast between that picture and the way he had spent his own evening smote him to the heart. Then and there he turned over a new, clean leaf and began to write upon it the record of a decent life.[2]

2. It is of great importance that we bear in mind that while the gospel of Christ calls us into personal relationship with Him, it is a relationship which nevertheless has social consequences. We must remember that while His blessing begins with us it by no means ends with

[1] *Life and Letters of the Rev. F. W. Robertson*, 273.
[2] C. R. Brown, *Yale Talks*, 91.

us, for 'no man liveth unto himself.' We must recognize that while we are units in the Kingdom of God, we are nevertheless joined to an innumerable company of similar units, and that our influence is for ever spreading, just as leaven spreads in a lump. This fact affords us at least a partial interpretation of much that is otherwise inexplicable in life, for God is always ordering our lives with a view to making their shadows helpful to others. It is not, for instance, merely that we may ourselves learn some lesson of faith and trust, or be purified in some needed measure, that we are put into the furnace of pain. It is also that our attitude of surrender and submission of love and of glad trust shall be seen of those who behold us. It is true that in a certain sense our lives, like His own, are vicarious in character. Our sufferings mean eventually a longer shadow; and a longer shadow means fuller blessing for other lives.

¶ Dean Inge writes of his little daughter, Margaret Paula, who entered into her rest on the night of Thursday in Holy Week, 1923: 'It was wonderful to see how quickly her character matured under the discipline of weakness. The words, "She is a real saint," were often spoken of her, and they seemed to us to be no more than the truth. On Palm Sunday I repeated to her Milton's sonnet on his blindness; and when I came to "They also serve who only stand and wait," I thought it right to say, "Paula, I should like you to remember that last line. You will never know how much you have done for all of us in this house, and for many others, simply by being what God has helped you to be."'

Do we not all know how easy it is to be good in the company of some Christians? How easy it is to have high thoughts and to be engaged with noble purposes when strengthened by fellowship with those who are themselves in fellowship with Him! And if this is so concerning ourselves, we may be sure it is equally so concerning others. Thus to the honest heart the fact becomes a query, 'Is my life helping others as I have been helped, or perchance hindering others as I have sometimes been hindered?' How searching is this consideration for parents, whose shadow is always falling upon their children; for masters, whose shadow is always falling upon the servants of the household; for each of us with the uncounted opportunities with which our lives are full for the exercise of saving influence upon others! Such a consideration is a condemnation to us all of the frequently unconsidered trifles of life, whose influence is often out of all proportion to their seeming import and whose very smallness demands the keeping of a careful watch. Thoughtless speech, careless gossip, trifling self-indulgence and the like, are some of the things which often distort the shadow, just because they first disturb the true relationship of the believer with his Lord. If we recognize that we are constantly casting a shadow it will enable us to exercise careful and prayerful watchfulness, and will thus save us from prejudicing men against the Lord whom we love and unto whom we would fain win them.

The fact of the unconscious influence which is common to us all is also full of comfort to those who are aged, and to whom opportunities for active service are now few. They are apt sometimes to chafe under the limitations and restrictions which life imposes upon them, and to sigh for the days when strength was adequate to opportunity and when the joy of work was their delight. If, however, they remember that as the sun nears the west their shadow may lengthen and increase, they may well cease vain regrets. There is nothing more beautiful and nothing that has greater power of winsome attraction than the influence of a matured Christian life—the ever-lengthening shadow of one who is nearing the end of the journey.

3. Surely, then, these things concerning our unconscious influence create a loud call to us to honest, thorough, and ruthless self-examination. How do we stand toward Christ, toward His revealed will, toward His warranted expectations? What is the measure of our surrender and obedience to Him? What is our daily attitude toward the light which He unceasingly sheds upon us? And the answer to these questions answers also the query, 'Of what sort is my shadow?' Sin, which though known and recognized is yet unconfessed and unrelinquished, puts a man out of right attitude toward Christ, and so causes the light of His countenance to be withdrawn that no saving or sanctifying influence can proceed from the life.

¶ The other day, travelling by rail through the centre of England, I revelled in the beauti-

ful landscape formed not only by the trees and hills but by their shadows also. Nearing a busy manufacturing town, with its great chimneys belching forth blackness, I lost the beauty of sun and shade alike, just because the dark pall of thick smoke hung between the earth and the face of the sun and cast a drab gloom over the whole district.[1]

This is the supreme test by which we may know ourselves in this respect—if there is anything that blots out the vision of Christ, that same thing is also militating against our true influence and spoiling our shadow. Let us then, having in view the great possibilities bound up in every life and also the great power which each is unconsciously exercising upon his fellow, honestly renounce every such thing of which we are made conscious, with that heart-whole renunciation which admits of no revision of judgment.

My life shall touch a dozen lives before this day is done—
Leave countless marks for good or ill ere sets this evening sun.
Shall fair or foul its imprint prove, on those my life shall hail?
Shall benison my impress be, or shall a blight prevail?

Does love in every handclasp flow in sympathy's caress?
Do those that I have greeted know a new-born hopefulness?
Are tolerance and charity the keynote of my song
As I go plodding onward with earth's eager, anxious throng?

My life shall touch a million lives in some way ere I go
From this dear world of struggle to the land I do not know.
So this the wish I always wish, the prayer I ever pray:
Let my life help the other lives it passes by the way.[2]

[1] J. S. Holden. [2] Strickland Gillilan.

The Courage and the Cowardice of Sin

Acts v. 28.—'Ye . . . intend to bring this man's blood upon us.'

1. How differently things look at different times! In the heat of passion consequences look small and of little account, but when the blood has time to cool the whole matter takes on another aspect. Looking forward in eager desire to a coveted object, nothing can be allowed to stand in the way, nothing is worth considering compared with the thing wanted; but looking back on the attainment, we cannot imagine that we offered such a price for it. When the balance of judgment is shaken by passion any risk seems small, any consequence seems cheap, but afterwards we think we must have been besotted to make such a poor bargain. Passion gives a spurious courage which throws down the gauntlet with an air of bravado, to be succeeded by a cowardice all the more apparent after the high and vaunting words.

'Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us'—a grieved complaint of injured men who have forgotten their previous cry—'His blood be on us and our children.' The courage and the cowardice of sin! In cold blood how differently this judicial murder of Jesus looked to all the actors in the tragedy! Pilate, whose blood had never been anything but cold, had washed his hands of it, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it.' Judas, who betrayed his Lord, went back with the thirty pieces of silver in despair when the dark passion had left his heart. 'See thou to it,' the priests said to Judas. You did it, and that is your concern; you cannot cast the burden on us by throwing back the money. And now the rulers who engineered the accusation say complainingly to the men who by their preaching were keeping green the memory of their victim, 'Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' None can be brought to accept the responsibility for this deed of shame. But the refusal did not alter any of the facts. How readily we think that if we protest against a thing formally we absolve ourselves!

Look on that picture, and now look on this. The deed was forgotten, buried, and life in the city went on as before, till the priests and rulers are annoyed by a little band of

men keeping alive the name of this same Jesus whom they had crucified. Those responsible for government are always and naturally content with keeping things going smoothly, and do not want to be troubled with new doctrines. So they set themselves by threats and imprisonment to choke off this new movement. In prison or out of it, however, Peter and the Apostles go on firmly and calmly, and the people are being won over. They are summoned before the council, and this is the charge, 'Did we not straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?' this name which they thought they had disposed of, but which was reappearing like an accusing ghost. 'Behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' It was fear of the people that was at the bottom of this complaint—they were not thinking of the moral guilt before God of having done to death an innocent man. Peter replied, 'The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.' His answer is a simple statement of fact, 'We are witnesses of these things.' Protesting and asserting and denying will not affect facts.

The priests probably did not remember the words that had been used at the trial of Jesus. The words had only been used as a move in the game with Pilate, and the present protestation had no reference to the previous words, but the two sayings give a dramatic turn to the situation, and bring out the deep truth we have suggested of the false courage and the weak cowardice of sin. In the heat and passion of the persecution of Jesus they took on them with light hearts all the guilt, if there was any. They were not afraid to assume responsibility, but now they would creep out of their own contract, shuffle off any guilt in the matter and wash their hands of the whole concern.

2. Is this only a leaf from ancient history, or has it a living moral for living men and women to-day? Does not the drunkard know better than we can tell him what he is paying for his sin, what he is losing, what he must suffer and cause others to suffer? He knows it, and in a way he counts the cost, but when the fierce temptation strikes him he will say that he will take the consequences. It is derangement of judgment, giving for the moment a kind of daring, a false courage like the hoarse cry of priests and people that day in Jerusalem, 'His blood be upon us and on our children.' It is no musty moral from an old record, but a fact true to human nature now as ever, where the same temptations strike the same place in the heart, and the same devil's reasoning deludes the soul. When the mad jealousy finds its seat in Cain's mind, when the smell of the pottage rises to Esau's nostrils, when the lust kindles in David's eye, when hate grows in the priests' hearts and rage grips the mob before pilate's seat, passion in each case sweeps away the defences and consequences are nothing. Any price so it be afterwards, the consequences be ours—we take them—the blood be on us! But when the passion has cooled and the price is demanded, the whole situation looks different. The confident cry, 'His blood be upon us,' becomes the whine, 'Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us.'

¶ In *Romola*, in the picture of the crisis of Tito's life, George Eliot says: 'He hardly knew how the words'—Tito had just denied his father, and the denial was useless as well as criminal—'he hardly knew how the words had come to his lips: there are moments when our passions speak and decide for us, and we seem to stand by and wonder. They carry in them an inspiration of crime, that in one instant does the work of long premeditation.'[1]

We see this courage and cowardice of sin exemplified every day. It is part of the deceitfulness of sin to deceive us at the two different stages—in the first to convince us that *the consequences are nothing*, and in the second *to drive us to despair*. We must not be blinded by passion to the fact that we live in a moral world governed by moral cause and effect as well as physical. What men sometimes call chance, and sometimes call fate, God calls consequence. 'Be not deceived, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.' 'His blood be on us and on our children,' cried the Jews on that fatal day, thinking that it meant nothing, that they were only idle words. The words may have been idle, but the deed was not idle and bore its dread fruits. The fickleness and folly and prejudice and impenitence and cruelty, of which the deed spoke, brought their harvest in kind. Spurn the subtle temptation which suggests that sin has no consequences. Distrust the

[1] G. A. Smith.

false courage which shuts the eyes to risks. Refuse to listen to the folly that a man can sow the wind and yet somehow avoid the necessity of reaping the whirlwind.

¶ Nemesis was George Eliot's watchword, but in her handling of this law she approached to the Greek Fate rather than to St Paul. It is this Fate that makes much of the extraordinary impressiveness of *Adam Bede*. Arthur Donnithorne's sin brought its retribution of terrible suffering not only to himself, but to Hetty, to Adam, to the Poysers. 'There's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for,' are the words wrung from him after bitter experience.[1]

In the other stage the deceitfulness of sin works equally falsely and insidiously, tempting a man this time to despair, suggesting that he is now past redemption, that he has made his bed and must lie on it, and that the best he can do is to evade as much as possible any disagreeable consequences. When evil can no longer deny moral results and moral punishments, its last resource is to deny redemption, deny forgiveness, deny hope. 'Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us,' querulously complained the priests. Yes, he did, as boldly he charged them, 'Ye slew him and hanged him on a tree.' But he had also a deeper and further intention, if they would but throw down their wretched defences, and confess their guilt and shame. He intended to show how they too might be cleansed by the penitential fires, how they too might be broken by that Cross and saved by that blood. The risen and exalted Christ had completed a work by which Israel if it would repent might be accepted of God. For them, too, was possible forgiveness, pardon, and peace.

¶ In the morning I took the Bible; and, beginning at the New Testament, I began seriously to read it. . . . It was not long after I set seriously to this work that I found my heart more deeply and sincerely affected with the wickedness of my past life. The impression of my dream revived, and the words, 'All these things have not brought thee to repentance,' ran seriously in my thoughts. I was earnestly begging of God to give me repentance, when it happened providentially, that very day, that, reading the Scripture, I came to these words, 'He is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance, and to give remission.' I threw down the book, and, with my heart as well as my hands lifted up to Heaven, in a kind of ecstasy of joy, I cried out aloud, 'Jesus, Thou Son of David, Thou exalted Prince and Saviour, give me repentance.' This was the first time that I could say, in the true sense of the word, that I prayed in all my life.[1]

[1] C. Gardner, *The Inner Life of George Eliot*, 117.

The Gospel of the Resurrection

Acts v. 30, 31.—'The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour.'

THE resurrection of Christ is the most challenging fact of history. It is a miracle of such tremendous quality that all the other miracles of the gospel story pale beside it into insignificance. Time was when a preacher on Easter morning would have given himself to build up arguments for the truth of the Resurrection. And, indeed, there are many arguments which could be brought forward. There is the argument of the New Testament book. You cannot account for this book except by the fact of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. And there is the argument of the New Testament men. You cannot account for Peter and Paul—the difference between the men they were and the men they became—except by way of a miracle, and that miracle is the miracle of Christ risen. Their whole life and personality became what they were because their hearts were kindled by the vision of the risen Christ, as flame is caught from flame.

But there is not so much need to-day to argue for the Resurrection. The outlook of thinking men has widened. Scientific men used to argue against it. They used to close up the Universe against the possibility of God and deny any value to spiritual experience outside their own explanation. They have given up this line of argument to-day. Life is far too wonderful a thing for any man to reduce it to a system and cry to faith, 'Hands off!'

What we ought to be concerned about most of all, then, to-day is not the truth of the Resurrection fact, but the meaning of it. What tremendous power was it that lay behind it? What was it that was happening there in that sealed tomb from which Christ came forth at

[1] *Robinson Crusoe.*

last, glorious in His risen life? The answer the Bible gives us, in phrase after phrase, is just this. It was a creative act of God. It was a new revelation of the living power of the living God. That, it says to us, is the kind of God with whom we have to do. We had learned something about Him before. We had learned that He is a God of righteousness, of purity, of truth—of righteousness and truth so unbending that Christ went to His Cross rather than yield one iota before the forces of the world. And we had learned that He is a God of love. That is the message of Calvary. But when Christ rose again we learned this, that this Spirit of righteousness and love is also the secret of power, able to unlock the gates of death, and turn the forces of Nature into an instrument of His Will. This is the final solution of the discussion we have been having these last years about might and right. Now we get it clear. They are both one in God. Might is right, and right is might, when you strike the fountain-head. In the last resort, love and righteousness are the only might, the only omnipotence. A spirit like that of Jesus holds the key to every prison-house of sin and suffering. He taps the resources of God by which every stronghold of evil which has mocked our puny science with its impassive walls is at last overthrown. When He steps into the world, a spiritual factor comes into play which changes the whole situation. Having dominion over sin through His fellowship with God, He had found the secret of dominion over disease and death. For when evil had done its worst and its storm and passion had gathered all its forces—social, military, political, ecclesiastical—to put Him to death, the Spirit of love and righteousness laid hold of that broken body in a stone-walled tomb and became triumphant and glorious in the risen Christ. 'Whom, therefore, they slew and hanged on a tree. Him God raised from the dead and exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour.'

Life would begin to blaze for us with all kinds of wonders if only we took time to steep our souls in such a vision of God as we find in the resurrection of Jesus. Listen to the apostles as they look death in the face. Listen to what they say of it because they had seen the glory of God in the face of the risen Christ. He hath abolished death—made it of no account. For them there was no such thing any more. If they had gone to one of our churchyards to-day, or to the battlefields of Flanders, with all their 'teeming crosses, row on row,' what would they have said of it? Would they not have said what one of our mystics said of a certain city cemetery, when a friend remarked to him how full it was becoming. 'Full,' he said, 'it is the emptiest place in all England!' He hath abolished death.

But that did not nearly exhaust the meaning of the Resurrection for these disciples. They were more interested in life than in death. There is a kind of faith in the Resurrection which turns this life into a mere vestibule to eternity, a corridor to heaven. That was not the way in which the apostles looked at it. The Resurrection had a meaning for life, and it is this. It meant the possibility of a new life here and now, a risen life, a new quality of being. They saw how the Spirit of God had come forth into this broken body and had changed it and made of it somehow—all marred and wounded as it was—a vehicle of His Spirit. And they said to themselves: If this is the God with whom we have to do, this new creating God, who lives in the risen Christ, what manner of men is it not possible for us to be, what manner of life is it not possible for us to live, and what manner of things is it not possible for us to do, with such a Prince and Saviour! The world began to palpitate with all kinds of victorious possibilities. Life became romantic with adventure.

There are three great new hopes which rise from this Resurrection fact and meet us in our world to-day.

1. The first is *a new hope for the individual*—the hope of resurrection to a new quality of life. As the Spirit of God came into that wounded and broken body of Christ, cannot the Spirit of God come into our lives, all stained and broken as they are, and raise them to a new quality of being—make of them, indeed, a new creation?

> True, I am worn:
> But who clothes summer, who is life itself?
> God, that created all things, can renew.[1]

Is it so strange after all? Is it so incredible? The genius of Michael Angelo can take a block of marble out of a scrap-heap, spoiled by a

[1] Browning.

bungler and cast aside, and turn it into a masterpiece, working the very disfigurement into his design? Will the genius of God do less for men than that? Can He not take this nature of ours, with all the stuff of daily toil and traffic, and make of it the medium of a finer life, a life radiant with power and peace, springing from man's inner fount of being, where Christ is enthroned as Prince and welcomed as Saviour?

¶ One of the most remarkable achievements of modern industry is the way in which the waste products of one industry are made to serve as the raw material of another. The paper on which you write your letters is made out of the waste rags and refuse of the city. In the record of the death of Lord Airedale, formerly Sir James Kitson, a Leeds manufacturer, an incident was recalled which occurred when on one occasion he met Carlyle. Carlyle had a great contempt for anything cheap, and spoke scornfully of Leeds as a shoddy manufacturing city. Sir James Kitson said to Carlyle, 'Do you mind if I tell you what shoddy is?' Carlyle replied, 'No.' 'Shoddy,' he said, 'is rags which are torn up by machinery and washed and turned into wool, and made into cheap clothing, enabling cheap and clean garments to be worn by working people.' 'Ah,' said Carlyle, 'I had not heard that aspect of the question.'[1]

2. In the second place, there is *a message of hope for the Church*. We remember what happened at Pentecost? Pentecost was the corresponding miracle in the Church to that which happened when God raised Christ from the dead. It was a resurrection. What was it that had happened? The Spirit which rose in Jesus had made of that humble company the vehicle of His life. The dominant note in their minds was an overwhelming and all-subduing consciousness of Christ as Lord, raising their whole nature to its highest level in a response of victorious energies.

All that is possible again. It is the eternal possibility of such a God abroad in such a world as this. It is for that resurrection we are waiting. Meanwhile let us cast away all depressions and lift up hearts of hope. Let us take a new look at God, as He is revealed in the risen Christ, and the same response of faith will be awakened; for the faith which makes us mighty is no artificial creation of our own resolve. It is the natural response to the vision of God we see in the risen Jesus.

3. But can we not go even further and say that there is *a message of hope for society*, for the social order in which man is bound to man and nation to nation? Look back through history and what do you see? You see the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of life, seeking some means of expression like an artist seeking paint and canvas. You see Him make man out of the clay to bear His image. You see Him take a race of slaves and nurse them into freedom and independence that they might reveal His mind and will to the world. You see Him coming into the world in Christ, revealing Himself and His glory in that life and death. You see Him taking new form for His Spirit in the glorified body of the risen Christ. You see Him gathering the Church and kindling there the flame Divine upon the altar of men's committed lives. Is it conceivable that it should all end there? Is it conceivable that the process should end before the whole social order in which man lives with man and nation with nation becomes a body for the Spirit of God? What does the Resurrection say to us looking on such a world as this? Does it not say that there is Power, power of infinite love and grace, able to enter this world and make it beautiful? There is power of love and goodwill, power of truth and brotherhood, by which society may be lifted out of its hatreds and conflicts into the ways of righteousness and peace. When we are at the end of our own resources we are only at the beginning of our resources in Him who was raised from the dead and exalted to become a Prince and a Saviour.

'All truth is crucified,' we said;
'The right is crushed. There lifts its head
Evil triumphant and elate.
The forces of the dark await
The final word that Truth is dead.'

The Spirit of the Time-to-be,
Of brotherhood, of manhood free,
Spoke to a prostrate world in tears;
'Be not afflicted. Quell thy fears.
Behold the place where over-sea,—

[1] E. J. Barson.

Europe a charnel-house—they laid
And guarded Him. Be not afraid
For He is risen. Every sun
That sees a deed of service done,
A brother's heart by kindness swayed,
Proclaims His resurrection known
Not in graved tower of pilèd stone,
But in the every act that can
Bring near the Brotherhood of Man.' [1]

The Forgiveness of Sins

Acts v. 31.—'Him did God exalt with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins' (R.V.).

The fact that our gospel is primarily and essentially a gospel of forgiveness is written large across the face of our sacred records. And this gospel of forgiveness meets the world's deepest need. The bottom evil of the world is not poverty, nor ignorance, but sin. What it suffers from is not an unenlightened mind, but an uneasy conscience and a polluted soul. And it is with this—the world's sorest need—that forgiveness deals, and deals effectively. Forgiveness is not simply a promise. Men do, in very truth, receive from Christ the remission of their sins. We have the experience of countless multitudes who know themselves forgiven, who rejoice in the conscious possession of the love and favour of God, to warrant and justify us in our faith when we say, 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins.'

¶ 'The Promises are sure if only we will believe' were the last words of my friend, the aged William Booth—very true words. And of these promises perhaps the greatest and the happiest for man is that of full and free forgiveness to those who kneel and from the heart will say, 'Father, I have sinned. Father, forgive!' [2]

And yet what a tremendous faith it is! 'Nothing, superficially, seems simpler or easier than forgiveness,' says Bishop Westcott; 'nothing, if we look deeply, is more mysterious or more difficult.' 'To reason,' he adds, 'the great mystery of the future is not punishment but forgiveness.' No! nothing is more difficult than forgiveness! Those difficulties are more keenly felt to-day than, perhaps, they ever were before. The scientific conception of the reign of law has been making its way silently and imperceptibly, but none the less surely, for the past half-century, until it has become an axiom in all our thinking. And with this belief in the reign of rigid law we have come to believe that 'evil once done is *done*, and no change of mind or mode of life in the guilty one can wipe out the effects of his transgression.' Science says so, and great writers like Ibsen and Thomas Hardy preach the same stern and despairing message.

1. Now, *what is the difficulty in the way of a belief in forgiveness?* In a word, it is the conviction that rigid and immutable law reigns in the universe, and that every broken law will exact its penalty. Law knows no mercy, and therefore to talk of forgiveness in a world of law is to talk poetry. That is so; if there is nothing but law in the world then there is no such thing as forgiveness. But we are not in a world of rigid and soulless law—we are in a world ruled and governed by a living God. The fact is, that so long as we only talk of abstract law, we are not, as Dr Denney says, dealing with *sin* at all. For sin can only be defined in one way, and that is by its relation to God. To use the word *sin* of an offence against any one but God is an abuse of terms. When we sin, it is not simply our own nature that we violate, it is not some abstract law we break—we resist and thwart and disobey the will of the Personal and Living God. The recognition of this simple fact that sin is an offence against a personal and living God, with whom we can hold personal and direct relations, disposes at once of any *a priori* objection to the possibility of forgiveness. If we have a Heavenly Father, and sin is sin against Him, then forgiveness must be possible. For forgiveness in such case will consist essentially in this—the resumption of the old relations of friendship and love. While in part the difficulty about forgiveness has arisen from the dominance of the idea of impersonal law, it has arisen in part also from the identification of forgiveness with the remission of penalty. But remission of penalty is by no means the whole of forgiveness; it is not the chief thing in forgiveness; it is not necessarily a part of it. As between persons, the essential thing in forgiveness is the restoration of love.

[1] Laura Bell Everett.
[2] H. Rider Haggard, *A Note on Religion*, 38.

And that is the essential thing in the Divine forgiveness—reconciliation, the restoration to love. That is the boon the human soul cries for. Do you remember the Psalmist's agonized cry: 'Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free Spirit'? That was what the Psalmist wanted; not the remission of any penalty he might be suffering, but the restoration of the favour and smile of God. And that is the very thing which is promised in the Gospels—not remission of penalty, but restoration to love. Reconciliation! as the Apostle Paul expresses it. Even assuming the reign of law to be rigid and unbroken, even allowing that every broken law exacts its uttermost penalty, that does not affect His power to forgive. Forgiveness is not remission of penalty, it is a change of relationship; it is the substitution for alienation and estrangement of affection and love. Can God forgive like that? Yes, He can. He not only can, He does.

Whenever humbly I begin
To search my heart and own to Thee
My great perversity and sin,
Thou hinderest me.

How can I tell what evil drifts
Beneath the bench, behind the door,
When, everywhere I turn, Thy gifts
Fill all the floor?

Miserere is not said
Ere Benedictus is begun;
O visit not upon my head
What Thou hast done![1]

2. But is that the whole of forgiveness? Or *does the gospel conception of forgiveness embrace also the idea of the remission of penalty?* No one can read his New Testament carefully without feeling that the gospel idea of forgiveness embraces also the idea of the remission of penalty, the undoing of the evil effects of sin. The Bible does not subscribe to the remorseless doctrine that the consequences of sin abide unchangeable, irremediable. It does not subscribe to the doctrine that the effects of an evil word or action can never be nullified or destroyed. Are these men never to be delivered from the bondage of evil desire, and from the torment of a tainted mind? And what about the evil they have done to others? Can that evil never be overtaken, never be arrested, never be undone? These are not easy questions to answer. The Bible itself insists upon it that sin brings its inevitable penalty, which even the penitent sinner shall not escape. And yet, if the Bible teaches one thing more clearly than another it is that, in time, the grace of God will bring to man release from the penalties of sin. The evil he did shall be destroyed, and he himself shall be set, without spot or blemish, perfect before God's throne.

¶ Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler, in one of her books,[1] narrates this conversation between a father and son:

'The teaching of modern philosophy is that what is done is done, and what we have written we have written; and that there is no atonement for the deed once accomplished, and no washing out of the handwriting against us. But I have not so learnt of Christ.'

'Then do you believe that what is done can ever be undone?' asked Paul. 'Surely that is impossible.'

'I do not wish to prophesy smooth things,' replied his father, 'nor to sprinkle the way of life with rose-water. I know that if a man breaks the law of Nature he will be punished to the uttermost, for there is no forgiveness in Nature. I know that if a man breaks the laws of society he will find neither remission nor mercy, for there is no forgiveness in society; but I believe that if a man breaks the law of God his transgression can be taken away as though it had never been, for "there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared."'

'It is a grand gospel that you preach, father, and seems almost too good to be true.'

'Nothing is too good to be true; the truth is the best of everything.'

Take a consideration or two that may help us to understand how such a remission is possible.

(1) In the first place, we must remind ourselves again of *the living and redeeming God.* This world is not under the sway of soulless, unmoral law; it is the sphere of operations of a living and redeeming God. Now to assert that sin is eternal and irremediable in its effect is either to forget God entirely or to say that

[1] Anna Bunston.

[1] *Concerning Isabel Carnaby.*

evil is stronger than God. When we say that the effects of sin on the individual are eternal, we forget that the living God Himself comes to the forgiven man, and God in a man becomes a fountain of healing, cleansing and restoring energy. That is a significant sentence in the Apocalypse where the angel, describing the multitude before the throne, says, 'These are they which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' Now, the blood is the life; and what the phrase means is that the redeeming and cleansing energies of the life of Christ in them had gradually set them absolutely free from every trace and defilement of sin. God is at work in our world, counteracting evil and ever seeking to destroy it.

Rout and defeat on every hand,
  On every hand defeat and rout;
Yet through the rent clouds' hurrying rack
  The stars look out.

Decay supreme from west to east,
  From south to north supreme decay;
Yet still the withered fields and hills
  Grow green with May.

In clod and man unending strife,
  Unending strife in man and clod;
Yet burning in the heart of man
  The fire of God.[1]

(2) And in the second place, we do well to remember that, on the plane of our everyday life, *love often interferes to prevent the infliction of the full penalty.* Others will take upon themselves the burden, that the actual sinner may go free. For instance, there is no one who could not quote illustrations of parents impoverishing themselves to hide the sin of their children and to deliver them from its doom.

¶ 'No man, or at least very few men, ever suffers all that he deserved to suffer. Frequently those whom he has most wronged refuse to inflict upon him the pain he has deserved. They keep the secret of his sin; they forgive him frankly; they cheer him on the path of amendment; they use their influence with others more powerful, and in this way there is mitigation and modification of sin's penalty.'[1]

[1] H. P. Kimball.

If men by their skill and love can avert part of the penalty of sin, is there anything irrational in the idea that God should be able to save us from the penalties of our own wrong-doing by bearing those penalties Himself? Cannot the Divine love do, at any rate, what human love can do? Here we come to the very heart of the gospel doctrine of forgiveness. If we can be forgiven at all, if we can be released from the pains and penalties of our sin, it is because love, in the person of Jesus, suffered in our stead, and took those penalties upon itself. That is the New Testament statement of the case. It declares that because of what Christ Jesus did upon the Cross, we are 'free from the law of sin and death.' It is that death that makes it possible for God to pardon men freely while yet 'doing right' by the ethical order. For we must remember that, though forgiveness is free, it is not *cheap*. It is not bestowed upon us with a smile and a wave of the hand; it comes to us by the Cross and Passion of the Son of God.

Even here we can see love obliterating the traces of sin, so that faces that once bore the brand of the beast begin to shine with the very light of heaven; even here we see love creating the clean heart and the right spirit. But we know not yet what we shall be. It is in the world to come that the wonderful achievement of God's forgiving grace will be fully realized. 'We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.'

Gamaliel

Acts v. 34-40.—'There stood up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in honour of all the people, and commanded to put the men forth a little while. And he said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves as touching these men, what ye are about to do. . . . Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown: but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them; lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God. And to him they agreed' (R.V.).

Like many men, Gamaliel had a very imperfect sense of the tremendous extent and depth of his own language.

Words are mighty things. Once gone forth, they cease to be the property of him from

[1] W. Robertson Nicoll.

whom they have proceeded. By them he must be justified; by them he must be condemned. But their worth does not depend on the motives which urged him to speak them, or upon the meaning which he perceived in them. If they are merely frivolous, they pass away and are lost among all the idle sounds of which the air is full; if they have substance and strength in them, they may live for generations, and prove their force in each by the events which it brings forth. If they are only aphorisms of prudence—yet prudence dwells with wisdom—prudence, like wisdom, comes by the inspiration of the Almighty.

In the New Testament Gamaliel appears twice, and both times in a most interesting way. First, he is the teacher of St Paul, and in the second place, when the apostles were arrested very soon after Pentecost for preaching Christ in Jerusalem, Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedrin, before which they were brought for trial, uttered a memorable plea for toleration and delay of judgment.

¶ Tolerance means reverence for all the possibilities of Truth; it means acknowledgment that she dwells in diverse mansions, and wears vesture of many colours, and speaks in strange tongues; it means frank respect for freedom of indwelling conscience against mechanic forms, official conventions, social force; it means the charity that is greater than even faith and hope.[1]

1. Gamaliel was the grandson of the great scholar and teacher Hillel, and he belonged distinctly to the same liberal school as his great ancestor. In those days there were two schools or parties among the orthodox religious Jews—the school of Shammai, which was strict and narrow, and the school of Hillel, which was liberal and free. Gamaliel was of the school of Hillel. He was a Pharisee; but he was not trammelled by the narrow bigotry of the sect. He rose above the prejudices of his party. Our impulse is to class him with the best of the Pharisees, like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathæa. Candour and wisdom seem to have been features of his character; and this agrees with what we read of him in the Acts of the Apostles—that he was 'had in honour of all the people.' He died eighteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem, about the time of St Paul's shipwreck at Malta, and was buried with great honour.

From Jewish sources we learn something of the character of Gamaliel's teaching. Almost alone of the Rabbis, he encouraged his pupils to read Greek literature, which the others regarded as a dangerous study. So to Gamaliel, possibly, was due the fact that St Paul could quote Cleanthes with such effect in his speech on Mars' hill. In his capacity as teacher he laid in St Paul the foundations of modes of thought and reasoning, the influence of which moulded the Apostle's whole soul and can be traced all through his Epistles. Analogy, allegory, illustration, form the staple elements of Eastern logic, and in their use St Paul was elaborately trained in Gamaliel's classes, and of their use his writings furnish abundant examples. If we were to specify the three effects which the teaching and example of Gamaliel may be supposed to have produced on the mind of St Paul, they would be as follows—candour and honesty of judgment, a willingness to study and make use of Greek authors, and a keen and watchful enthusiasm for the Jewish law.

¶ What were the Rugby, the Uppingham school-books compared with the personality of an Arnold, a Thring? What were the Balliol traditions compared with the influence of a Jowett? What a story is that of Da Feltre of Mantua in the fifteenth century! Villari says of him: 'His success in so immoral an age was entirely owing to the nobility and generosity of his mind. . . . For a long time his pupils were distinguished by a loyalty of character in strong contrast with the general corruption.' He believed evidently in Joubert's maxim: 'Make truth lovely and do not try to arm her; mankind will then be far less inclined to contend with her.'[1]

¶ Baur and the Tübingen school find it so difficult to reconcile Gamaliel's attitude in Acts v. with the persecuting spirit afterwards shown by Saul, then his pupil, that they pronounce the whole passage unhistorical. But do pupils never in later years diverge from their teachers' doctrines? And may not special circumstances have arisen in connection with the appearance of Stephen which called forth a fanatic zeal in Saul little in accord with his early training?[2]

[1] John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, ii. 137.

[1] J. Brierley, *Faith's Certainties*, 24. [2] G. Milligan.

2. But there is a larger view of Gamaliel than this. He has his relation not merely to St Paul, but to the whole opening history of Christianity.

A day came when Gamaliel was summoned hastily to a meeting of the Sanhedrin. The ringleaders of this Christian movement had been caught. The evidence against them was clear. So far from retracting their heresy, their spokesman reiterated it in the presence of the Council, defying the Sanhedrin, and speaking of their crucified Founder as a 'Prince and a Saviour.' It only remained to pass sentence of death. But at this juncture 'there stood up,' in St Luke's words, 'a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in honour of all the people.' 'Take heed to yourselves,' he said, 'as touching these men what ye are about to do.' Other false religious movements there had been, he urged; they too had seemed dangerous for the moment, but by reason of their falsity had speedily failed. And so he sums up his advice in words which, considering their occasion and their source, must be regarded as one of the finest utterances in the New Testament: 'I say unto you, Refrain from these men and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown: but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them; lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God.'

His words prevailed, and the lives of the apostles were spared. Humanly speaking, who can estimate the difference made in all the subsequent history of Christianity by this fact, which was due solely to Gamaliel's speech?

(1) The first thing that is evident about this speech is that the man who makes it believes in God. This is not a mere faith *about* God; he believes *in* God. To him evidently surrounding all that man does—behind it and before it and working through it—there is God. And with God are the final issues and destinies of things. Work as man will, he cannot make a plan succeed which God disowns; work as man will, he cannot make a plan fail which God approves. That is a noble and distinct faith. It is stepping across the line between fear and courage, between restlessness and peace, between intolerance and charity, when a man thoroughly, heartily, enthusiastically enters into that faith, when he comes to believe that with all his heart and soul.

¶ The same tolerance based on faith in God is greatly needed to-day. Not that men should be indifferent as to what is thought or said, but that they should have such faith in God as to believe that the truth will ultimately prevail.

At bottom intolerance is the product of scepticism and consequent fear. The intolerant man is afraid because in his heart he does not believe that God has any existence apart from himself. Instead of believing in God he patronizes Him as an extension of himself and goes about in mortal fear lest his own little private theories of life be disturbed.

Surely the teaching of history is plain: There can be no boundaries set to thought; there can be no forcible control of belief.

> The truth is great and shall prevail
> When none care whether it prevail or not.[1]

(2) And yet we want to know what it is to believe in God and to trust Him for the great results of things. It is not to rest in idleness. Gamaliel worked. Nobody can doubt that Gamaliel went back from the Sanhedrin meeting to teach with all his might that Christianity was wrong. He had his thoughts, and he upheld them. He said, 'This is the truth'; only, as he said that, he must have said also to his scholars, 'There are some men here in Jerusalem—earnest, brave, enthusiastic, woefully deluded, as I think—who are asserting that not this which I tell you about the Messiah, but something else quite the opposite, is true. They are asserting that the Christ has come, and that His reign has begun. I think these men are wrong. I give you my reasons. By and by you will see their fanaticism wither and dry up because no life of God is in it. But now let them alone. Believe your truth, assert it, prove it, live it: so will you do your best to kill this folly.' That was Gamaliel. That is the true spirit always. To hold your truth, to believe it with all your heart, to work with all your might first to make it real to yourself and then to show its preciousness to other men, and then—not till then, but then—to leave the questions of when and how and by whom it shall prevail to God; that is the true life of the true believer.

¶ Belief in God is only made our very own by our meeting the work of daily life trusting

[1] H. van Dyke, *Light My Candle*, 61.

in what we believe, trying it, proving it and finding by proof that the facts we have known as bits of history which belonged to us became, when acted on, bits of our own lives, certainties inseparable from ourselves.[1]

(3) Gamaliel believed that God was the only life of this world, that all which did not live in Him must die. We do not know whether he became a Christian before he died, whether, in this life, he ever saw that the true light which these poor prisoners adored was true and gave himself to Christ. The legends say that he did. History seems to say that he did not. But at least we know that, if we have rightly read his character and story, he made the Christian faith more possible for other men, and he must somewhere, sometime—if not here, then beyond—have come to the truth and to the Christ Himself.

Stephen the Deacon

Acts vi. 5.—'Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.'

STEPHEN was so great a martyr that we have almost forgotten that he was anything else. The blaze of glory in which his life closed hides from our vision the train of virtues that kindled it. Yet it was as a hard-working servant of the Church, a bit of her organization, one of the bearings of the machine, so to speak, and one of those bearings which carried at the time most of the friction, that Stephen began his work; and it was his moral and his intellectual force as we see it revealed through the speech, his understanding of, and his insight into, God's working in history that forced on his martyrdom. For a time, even though the Book in which the story lies be called the Acts of the Apostles, the apostles disappear, and the whole crisis of which Stephen is the chief factor and which culminates in the conversion of Saul, and the opening of the world to the Church, and her mission to the Gentiles, is achieved without one of them being present. Stephen stands alone to our view.

1. *Stephen as an Example in Service.*—He is introduced to us as a man already greater than his fellows, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. Now that of course is in the main a moral inspiration and endowment, but we must never forget that the Scriptures from beginning to end, when they talk of God's gifts by the Holy Spirit, include intellectual as well as moral awakening, and of these superb intellectual gifts which the author of all wisdom bestows upon the least of Christian disciples, Stephen's speech furnishes us with a conspicuous example. But it is his fullness that is above all emphasized. The man was an all-round Christian first of all, so cleansed of self, so purified by the grace and the Spirit of Jesus Christ, as to be ready for everything that God's Spirit can bestow upon a man, and in consequence of this fullness he gives the inevitable proofs of fullness—eloquence and a magnificent courage. Yet this all-round man, this full Christian, was content to take up the office of a deacon. Now this office had been created out of the necessities of the Church's life, in order particularly to look after the widows of certain parties in the new Church, and to attend to their daily ministration. It was to secure for these women their place at the daily mess-tables of the community; and besides, these widows were not always pleasant subjects to deal with; wanting a great deal in knowledge on account of their seclusion and their ignorance, which are common to widows in eastern life—wanting a great deal of the shrewdness and wisdom and humour and high character that make visiting aged and sick folk among ourselves so often a pleasure and an inspiration. We are told that there was a communism of goods in the Early Church; that all the disciples brought their properties and their money and laid them at the apostles' feet, and had everything in common; but this act of Stephen shows us, in the light of his character, that the Church inspired another communism, the nobler communism of gifts, the devotion by the Church of the best men within her to the most difficult duties, and the devotion by these men of the best part of themselves. Think, then, of this magnificent man, this scholar and worker of miracles, this all-round Christian intellect so splendidly endowed, giving himself in the first place to this service; and then say, is there any duty in the Christian Church too full of drudgery or thought to be too mean for us, any man or woman too abject for us to lay our lives alongside, and to help with all the gifts that God may have endowed us with?

[1] E. Thring.

¶ Lord Guthrie was the son of the famous Dr Thomas Guthrie, whose striking statue now adorns the Princes Street gardens in Edinburgh, and whose name is still a fragrant memory north of the Tweed. Charles John Guthrie, who was cast in his father's noble mould, with the same great and gracious ways, was for many years a leading figure in the social and religious life of Edinburgh. There was something quite irresistible in his radiant charm, whether you met him in private life or heard him on the platform of a public meeting. He touched life at many points; he moved easily among the great and famous; travel, art, literature, music—he sought and loved them all. But in his closing days it was his thirty odd years of work in the Sunday school that gave him most pleasure in the retrospect.[1]

2. *Stephen's Message.*—Without entering into Stephen's speech and the magnificent intellectual qualities that it displayed, let us see just what its message is. He dwells with particular emphasis upon God Himself, whom he calls more than once the God of Jacob, the same unchanging living God that had worked and blessed His people from the beginning with His grace, and is with them still. But he points out to the Council that down through all the history of their nation that unchanging God is every now and then changing His purpose and His ideals for His people and for His Church; bringing Abraham out of Mesopotamia to the Promised Land; bringing Abraham's descendants out of that land into servitude in Egypt; bringing them out of that slavery back to the land; telling them to build a house, and after that house had been built by Solomon, and through long association and use had grown sacred and even sublime in the eyes and faith of His people, God bade them depart from it, saying that He dwelt not in houses made by hands—heaven is His throne and the earth is His footstool. New conditions and new outlooks and new ideals for God's people, all coming from the same unchanging living God, whereby they were often compelled to turn their back upon the things that their fathers had believed and trusted in, in order to trust God Himself the more fully, and be by Him led out to new fields of vision and enterprise. That is the lesson of the speech; that is the lesson which the Council could not stand; that is the teaching for which they dragged Stephen outside the Council chamber and beyond the city walls and stoned him to death. And in that hour when all had turned against him and no man stood with him, Stephen in death and in persecution had a vision and an assurance, very brilliant and clear, of the power of the Lord whom he had thus confessed before men, standing by the right hand of God in heaven, ready to receive him.

3. *The Lessons in the Story.*—First, there is very conspicuous in Stephen the ability to distinguish between the temporal and the eternal in religion, and to hold to the latter, to live and to die for it, and to let the rest go down the wind, however sacred it may have become by long use and associations. That is a lesson that God's Church needs to learn anew in every generation, and perhaps there never was a generation which so much as our own had to lay the lesson to heart, and follow Stephen in discriminating between what is temporal and accidental, between what has been for a time and for a locality, and what is eternal and abiding; and hold fast to that. And we need not go further than Stephen himself to find what is eternal and abiding in religion. It is what he found—the living God Himself as revealed in Jesus Christ, full of grace to save men from sin, and always urgent to lead them forward into new truth. And if we ask ourselves what is the new truth which Christ's Spirit desires to teach us, we will remember that Stephen earned his right to find out what was essential in religion, and what was obsolete and might be let go, by devotion to the Church's practical work, by imitation of Christ Himself, and by what distinguishes him, according to our text, above all things, faith—faith, and the result of faith, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And the second point is that Stephen carried out this loyalty to Christ, this practical devotion to Christ's gospel, to the very full in his life and conduct; as a beginning of his lowly service, washing in imitation of the Master the disciples' feet; performing for them acts of drudgery and hard service without stint, using every one of his great gifts in the carrying out of them. And he confessed Christ before men, and when

[1] G. Jackson, *A Parson's Log*, 140.

that confession led him at last to his martyr's death, under the cruel circumstances of that death he put into practice, just where it was most difficult to put it into practice, the mind of Christ, calling down forgiveness upon his enemies. And that is his full practical example to ourselves; and because he was thus loyal to his Master, according to His promise given before, the Lord accepted and owned his service. He did not betray, as He never has betrayed, the heart that trusted Him and served Him loyally, and He appeared in the hour of need to Stephen in all power, and made death itself the gate to everlasting life.

Have we Stephen's vision? Are we able to discriminate between the temporal and the eternal in religion? Have we Stephen's thoroughness? Are we carrying out our Christianity, as he did, into our lives, making it real and effective?

From scheme and creed the light goes out,
The saintly fact survives;
The blessed Master none can doubt
Revealed in holy lives.[1]

Brotherhood

Acts vii. 26.—'Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?'

What seemed to Stephen, as it had seemed to Moses, such a miserable thing was that blood was so very little thicker than water. When Moses saw one of the Egyptian taskmasters smiting a Hebrew he took the side of his oppressed brother and avenged his wrongs. Moses was not a Christian, and he went beyond the law which he afterwards adopted. But what was his surprise the very next day to find a Hebrew smiting a Hebrew? Not an Egyptian this time, but one of his own race smiting another of his own race. And when he said, 'Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?' he that did his neighbour wrong, said to Moses, 'Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? thinkest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?' Then Moses understood, as did Stephen afterwards, how short a distance race and nationality take you on the way to heaven or towards inheriting even the earth; how quarrels and enmity may break out even among brethren; and oppressions may come in from many directions not only of rich over poor, but of poor over poor, and of few over many, as well as of many over few.

Was not one of the apostles who saw Stephen stoned by men of his own race and nation soon to be saddened by beholding that there was no guarantee of peace and love even in baptismal waters, and that soon brother would go to law with brother and that before the unbelievers? And worse still would happen when Papists would put Protestants to death, and Protestants Papists, each thinking they were doing God service, forgetting the methods of brotherhood, and acting as if they could not hear the Holy Ghost warning them not so to do. You remember the motto ascribed to the violent men of the French Revolution, 'Be my brother or I will kill you.'

There is a great hunger in the soul of man for brotherhood, and the Church was meant to be the most perfect Brotherhood the world had ever seen. The teaching of Jesus may be summed up in the simple words: the Fatherly love of God, the Brotherly love of man, and the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. He often talked of the Kingdom of Heaven, but never about the King. There is not any king in that Kingdom of God; only a Father. The genius of His gospel was the extension of the idea of the family to include all humanity; its law, love of God and love of man; its ideal, a Beloved Community in loyalty to which human life, both personal and social, finds fruition and fulfilment. That is to say, brotherhood is not a mere detail in the religion of Jesus, but the essence and glory of His gospel.

1. Here in the teaching of Jesus—and here alone—we have a faith and a vision equal, alike in nobility and comprehensiveness, to the problems that face us. Surely the first and most pressing of all problems is to organize the goodwill, the moral intelligence, and the practical acumen of the world, and make an end of war. A League of Nations is a great Christian ideal, the greatest ever put before the world. In one of the first Christian sermons recorded in this very book of the Acts of the Apostles

[1] Whittier.

we are told that God has made of one blood every nation upon earth. It may have been a necessary evolution that the 6000 years of recorded human history should have been one long story of cruel and murderous wars, but it never by any possibility could have been the ultimate will of God. Those who say that war is a necessity in human life, however unconsciously, do, we believe, blaspheme God. As one saw the pictures recently unearthed in ancient Mervë depicted in the Temple to the Sun, one saw a long series of conquerors dragging along their victims by the hair of their heads; this, no doubt, accurately represented the history of the Sudan. Can this really be the ultimate will of God for the world?

¶ In the early part of the Great War a young English officer, who was killed on the following day, wrote his last letter to his father. He said: 'Having been out all night digging, I was shifted to make room for some other company. I advanced to a cemetery to defend it and stayed there most of the day. It is a beastly thing to have to do, digging trenches among graves and pulling down crosses and ornamental wreaths to make room. One feels that something is wrong when a man lies down behind a child's grave to shoot at a bearded German who has probably got a family anxiously awaiting his return home. It was a miserable day and spent in the cemetery under these conditions. There was a large crucifix at one end. The sight of the bullets chipping Christ's image about, and the knowledge of what He has done for us and for the Germans, and what we are doing to His consecrated ground and to each other, made one feel sick of the whole war, or sicker than before.' [1]

It may be that we have not learnt the lesson; it may be that the folly and the waste of war is not yet branded into the conscience of mankind; but at least let the Christians of the world make an effort; in private conversation, by public speech, by vote, by influence let us back up the lead of the Christian statesmen of the world, and see if at last trust may not take the place of suspicion, brotherhood succeed strife, and mutual helpfulness take the place of envious jealousy! In any case, let us recognize the patent fact that a League of Nations is *Christianity writ large.*

[1] Dean Inge.

2. In our inter-racial relations we need the spirit of brotherhood. So long as distances were great and races lived in separate lands this problem was not so keenly felt, but to-day the world has shrunk to the size of a neighbourhood and many peoples are mingled. Lord Morley thinks the problem of the black man in America 'insoluble,' and so it is, if we forget that he is our brother in black. As a welter of rancours and suspicions, as a wrangle of irritations, it is hopeless. Not less so the medley of races in this Empire, some of them among the oldest races of humanity, and others just emerging from primitive life. If these races appeal to the magnates of Mammon as a field for investment how much more shall they touch the hearts of those who are followers of the Son of Man! What human resources are there waiting to be turned to the highest service, if only we can realize that we are brothers—that the injury of one is the hurt of all—and let each race be free to unfold its best life, adding its gift to the Human Commonwealth.[1]

¶ We must all die. But that I can save him from days of torture, that is what I feel as my great and ever new privilege. . . . His hand feels for mine and will not let it go. Then I begin to tell him and the others who are in the room that it is the Lord Jesus who has told the Doctor and his wife to come to the Ogowe, and that white people in Europe give them the money to live here and cure the sick negroes. Then I have to answer questions as to who these white people are, where they live, and how they know that the natives suffer so much from sickness. . . . The African sun is shining through the coffee bushes into the dark shed, but we, black and white, sit side by side and feel that we know by experience the meaning of the words, 'And all ye are brethren.' [2]

3. Dark and menacing is the problem of industrial unrest, and here again there is no hope but in the practice of brotherhood. Many men miss this, and so they fail to see the deeper meaning of the struggle. They suppose that the questions at issue have to do with hours and wages, with ownership of tools and management of industry. All these are real questions, but they do not touch the heart of the problem. The fundamental defect is broken brother-

[1] J. Fort Newton in *World-Brotherhood*, 257.
[2] A. Schweitzer, *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest.*

hood, and so the fundamental remedy must be found in renewed brotherhood. We must go down and down beneath all mere surface questions of hours and wages, ownership and management, and deal with fundamental human relations. We must honour those relations; we must seek to adjust them in terms of justice and love. This will lead us to remove the handicaps that are upon our fellows. It will ensure equality of opportunity for all, and cause just and equitable distribution of the proceeds of industry. The way of brotherhood is the way to industrial peace.[1]

No one living has set to nobler music the yearning for fraternity and the passion for social justice and a more practical religion than Edwin Markham. He it was who summed up the things needful to man in three words, Bread, Beauty, and Brotherhood, to expound which his song takes many keys and variations. For him Bread is a symbol of all the material needs that lie at the basis of life—food, shelter, clothing, air-space—the elementary necessities which healthy physical life demands. Man does not 'live by bread alone,' but he cannot live without bread; and if some go hungry in a world of plenty it is proof that some one else has been unbrotherly. Yet the problem of Bread itself cannot be solved in terms of bread alone, and every effort to do so ends in defeat. Therefore to Bread we must add Beauty, else our bread will be stale and unsatisfying.

Now by Beauty our poet means the things of the mind, of the spirit, that heavenly manna which feeds the heart, that spiritual idealism of which it has been said that, if it cannot bake bread, it can give us God, Duty, and Immortality—those realities without which our bread is a stone. Ruskin knew this when he went to and fro over England, moved by the Spirit of Beauty, as Wesley before him had been moved by the Spirit of Jesus, seeking to touch the drab, dingy industrial life of his day with the glow and colour of art. But Ruskin learned that if Bread is to be sacramental, and Beauty consecrating, it must be by the realization of the Spirit of Brotherhood. Otherwise life is not a banquet where all are served, but a hideous scramble where life treads on life, and heart on heart. By as much as we live the brotherly life in the Church, in business, in all our relations, by so much do we help to bring the Kingdom of God, the Father.[1]

We are sure that yet

Shall dawn the golden day
To which true hearts are pressing,
When earth's discordant strains shall blend,
The one true God confessing.
When Christly thought and Christly deed
Shall bind each heart and nation
In one grand brotherhood of men
And one high consecration.

[1] S. Z. Batten.

The God of the Patriarchs

Acts vii. 32.—'The God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'

THERE is no knowledge attainable by man so vital as the knowledge of his God. When we remember that without His hand not a blade of grass would have been green—when we remember that we depend on Him for every heartbeat and for every breath—when we remember that time is but an island engirdled by the ocean of eternity, who does not feel the pressure to know God? If life eternal be life in glorious fullness, then to know God must be eternal life. And that is why, in this strange life of ours, with all its struggling interests and ambitions, there is nothing that can for a moment be compared with knowing Him with whom we have to do. Far more important than attaining wealth, though that be the one passion of the market—far more important than achieving fame, that last infirmity of noble mind—far more important than anything on earth, in present influence and in eternal issue, is knowing whose we are and whom we serve. Now that is the value of such texts as this. They illuminate the character of God.

1. The first truth we learn is that God is *the God of separate individuals.*

When we go back in thought to those dim days that lie upon the farthest verge of history, we are oppressed, wherever we may turn, by a strange feeling as of a shadowy multitude. We catch the confused sound of human voices; we light on relics of pyramid or fort, where thousands must have ingloriously toiled, and of battles where thousands must have fallen, and

[1] J. Fort Newton.

some, it may be, gloriously died. Always, in that dim and distant past there are confused and shadowy masses, till the sense of the individual is lost. And it is then, above that rocking and surging of humanity, that there rings out from the eternal throne, 'I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.' He is not only the God of the innumerable; He is the God of the individual soul. Where we hear but a distant murmuring, He hears the separate beat of every heart. Viewed from the standpoint of the twentieth century, there is nought visible save shadowy multitude; but viewed from the altitude of heaven, the one is as conspicuous as the all. He hath an ear for every feeble cry, and a great compassion for every bruised heart, and a watchful pity, like a mother's pity, for lips that are craving for a little water. It was a great thought which Peter uttered when he said to all who read, 'He careth for you.' But Paul was nearer the heart of the eternal when he said, 'He loved me, and gave himself for me.'

This thought of God is countersigned in the clearest way by Christ. It is true that there was something in a crowd that stirred our Saviour to His depths. He was moved with compassion when He saw the multitude, as a flock of sheep without a shepherd. There was a place for the all within that heart of His. He saw life steadily, and saw it whole. Yet, living for mankind, He spoke His deepest when His whole audience was one listener. Dying for mankind, His heart was thrilled with the agonized entreaty of one thief. For one coin the woman swept the house; for one sheep the shepherd faced the midnight; for one son, and him a sorry prodigal, the father in the home was broken-hearted. That is complete assurance that our God is the God of individuals.

¶ In the *Memorials of Sir Edward Burne-Jones* his wife, who writes the Life, has this remark about him: 'As a rule Edward was a little irritated by people finding likenesses in one face to another. "It is difference, not likeness, that I see," he would say.'

¶ In the Tate Gallery there hangs a striking picture called 'The Doctor,' by Sir Luke Fildes, the illustrator of Dickens' works. The picture shows a room in a cottage and a sick child upon a bed. In the shadows stand the father and the mother, and seated by the bedside is the doctor, bending over the child with a tender and painful solicitude. His whole heart, mind and soul are going out to it. All his experience, all his skill, and all his patience are concentrated upon the saving of that little life.

2. The second truth we learn is that God is *the God of differing personalities.*

As the three figures mentioned in our text move silently across the page of Scripture, one of the first things to impress us in them is the distinctness of their personalities. You may have seen sometimes in an old Scottish home a series of pictures of the family ancestors. No doubt these ancestors existed, in the warm imagination of the artist. But what strikes one in these pictures is not the differences of face and form, but their extraordinary and unearthly likeness to each other. Now if the picture-gallery of God were such a fiction, we should expect to find a sameness of that kind. And to us it is a kind of quiet assurance that we are dealing in the Word with real men, when we discover in the remotest of them a personality that could never be mistaken. They are as different in tone and temper as is the twilight from the dawn. And yet that God who is the God of one is not less really God of the other two.

Let us think for a moment of these three personalities, that we may understand the grandeur of our text.

First we have Abraham, the man of faith, and of the splendid heroism which faith inspires—the man who sees with an inspired directness, who dares with the fine audacity of greatness, who never rears his tent against the storm but close beside his tent he builds an altar. Here is a man who always must be great, gifted with all capacity for leadership, cleaving his way through a thousand lesser things to grasp and grip the things that really matter, a man as large of heart as he is tender, and of a certain sweet and beautiful simplicity—such is the personality of Abraham.

And then we have Isaac, meditative Isaac—Isaac who was never born to greatness, but only had greatness thrust upon him. A man not fitted for the strenuous life, a lover of the sanctities of home, and of the sweet serenities of Nature—a quiet believer in his father's God, though dowered with nothing of his father's heroism, not ardent, not intense, and never masterful. Love Divine meant much to

Isaac, but the warmth of human love meant even more; a man domesticated, and in love with peace, and hating strife, and with a tinge of melancholy—such is the personality of Isaac.

And then lastly we have Jacob, different from Isaac as night is from day, a man of power in every line of him, who would have been a millionaire but for the grace of God. Shrewd, subtle, infinitely capable, not gifted at his birth with scrupulosity, a man whom the devil could have used magnificently had not God in His preventing mercy been beforehand; a man with that splendid genius for commerce that has been the birthmark of his Hebrew race, yet never lacking that other Hebrew birthmark, the awful sense of an Almighty God. In every sense of the word a strong man—a man who was not to be baffled in his quest, whether his quest was a bargain or a woman—such is the personality of Jacob. The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob—do you see the glorious compass of that now? Separate as the east is from the west, each found his rest and his reward in Him. So do we learn that the God of revelation has a heart that is bigger than our widest difference, and has room in His love, and in His service too, for men who stand apart as night from day.

This feature, too, of the Divine character is clearly exhibited by Jesus Christ. His God appeals not to one type of man; His God appeals to all. This is the wonder of the God of Jesus, that He has a message for a thousand hearts, and kindles into love and ministry every variety of personality. That is why the mother in the home may pray with confidence for all her children. She is not praying to the God of Abraham only, though even that would be a glorious privilege. She prays to the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.

¶ 'Here is the story of the Three Wise Men,' says *My Magazine*, 'in its wonderful Persian dress':

'The Three Wise Men came from Phars in Persia. They were students of the stars, and had seen from the stars that One would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. But the stars told not enough. They were uncertain whether this One would be King, Priest, or Physician, so they took with them gifts suitable to each, gold and frankincense and myrrh, and went forth on their journeying far across the desert ways, guided by the star.

'They were three: an old man, a middle-aged man, and a boy. At last they came where the Young Child lay, in a stable at Bethlehem of Judea. As they talked by the way they agreed that each should go in separately, the boy first, so that the accepted gift might tell them whom they worshipped—King, Priest, or Doctor.

'And now all three had been into the stable, bearing their precious gifts in their hands, and each had returned empty-handed.

'"He is all three—King and Priest and Healer," they said to each other with bated breath.

'But they stood puzzled and hesitant, looking each at each, waiting to speak, and yet fearing to say a word.

'At last the old man had courage and put the question which all desired to have answered. With a hand on the boy's shoulder he asked: "Of what age perhaps, my son, was the Child you saw?"

'"Ah, that was troubling me also, my father," said the boy. "He was a boy of my own age."

'"Nay," said the middle-aged man, "he was a man of exactly my years."

'"Ye both err," said the old man, "for an old, old man was he, like unto me!"'

3. Then the third truth we learn is that God is *the God of succeeding generations*.

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were not only men of differing personality—we must not forget that they were also men of separate and succeeding generations. Now in history there have been generations that differed but little from those preceding them. But when we study the Book of Genesis we find that that does not apply to the generations of the patriarchs. There was a different environment for each of them; there was a differing outlook on the world. So Jacob woke, and the world that met his eyes was not the world that Isaac had delighted in, nor was the world of Isaac that of Abraham. God is the God of succeeding generations. No generation can exhaust His name. No single age can know Him in His fullness. Not even Abraham, for all his faith, can learn the largeness of the heart of God. There is something left for Isaac to discover as he meditates in the fields at eventide, and when Isaac has been gathered to his fathers, still is there fresh light to flash on

Jacob. No age has a monopoly of God. None must dictate to the coming days. One might have thought that in a new environment there would have been needed for mankind a new Divinity. When knowledge had widened, and all the world was different, would not the heart demand a different God? This is the strange thing of it, that though everything changes as generations pass, the heart still needs, with an undying need, the God who spoke to men so long ago. And when our task is over, and we sleep, and our children are carrying on the warfare, still, though heaven and earth have passed away, the God of Isaac will be the God of Jacob. It is only in that faith we can be hopeful. It is only in that faith we can be true. It is only in that faith that we can welcome every discovery which science brings. Let there be light, although the light should penetrate many a secret that seemed big with heaven—He is the God of succeeding generations. We see not the mighty changes yet to be. Dimly we feel that those who are now children will live and battle in an altered universe. But we know that, whatever change may come, the human heart will still break through to God and, finding Him who is their deepest need, will find He is the God of long ago. Were He the God of Abraham alone, then all the glory would be in bygone days. Were He the God of Isaac only, then we should have no hope but for to-night. But we look backward with adoring gratitude, and forward with a heart at rest, as we remember that the God we trust is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.

Whate'er may change, in Him no change is seen,
A glorious sun, that wanes not, nor declines;
Above the clouds and storms He walks serene,
And on His people's inward darkness shines.
All may depart—I fret not nor repine,
While I my Saviour's am, while He is mine.[1]

Stephen the Man

Acts vii. 55.—'But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.'

We think of Stephen as the great Church teacher who first saw and taught the spirituality and universality of the Christian faith, and it was as a martyr to that truth—a gospel unfettered by any restrictions of race or form or worship—that he died. He was led to perceive the distinction between what was form and what was substance, between what was local and temporary in Judaism and what was of universal and abiding value. He was the first to see that the Christian Church must burst the shell in which it was confined, and start upon an independent career. He was as one standing on the hill-top on whom the light dawns long before it reaches those who dwell in the valley. And he paid the penalty which has so often fallen on those who had the open mind to see and the courage to be loyal to unpopular truth. That is the light in which Stephen comes before us in his public character.

For a little let us think of Stephen, not in his public character as a great Church teacher, but as an individual Christian, and note certain aspects of the Christian life as these are presented in his brief history. For it is very brief. Our eye is permitted to rest upon him only during the last hour of his life, as he halts before the Sanhedrin to utter the testimony which he so bravely sealed. But there was something going before that, preparing for it. We know that the virtues, the graces, which at last shine with such lustre, and are conspicuously displayed in triumphing over all that men most fear, have been nurtured and exercised and strengthened in obscurity. If in after years he has been honoured as the first Christian martyr, during his life he would be tenderly remembered in many a humble dwelling in the lanes and poor streets of Jerusalem, chiefly for visits of sympathy and words of encouragement and deeds of kindly helpfulness, and for long many an aged widow's eye would brighten at the mention of his name.

We get the keynote of all that is recorded of Stephen's life and character in the words 'He, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven.' That was not a mere outward gesture, it was not a solitary act; it expressed the constant habit, the normal attitude of his soul. Habitually he looked through the things that are seen to the things that are not seen, and saw life in the light of God. He saw the one perfect revelation of the character of God in the face of Jesus Christ. That is the explanation of his life; and it is from that

[1] H. F. Lyte.

standpoint that we see those features which stand out in the story of his life.

1. He was 'full of grace and power.' In another verse it is said he was 'full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.' Practically it is the same thing. The one is cause; the other is consequence. The one points to the inward fact, the thing which made him what he was; the other to the manifestation of that, the impression which he left upon those who came into contact with him.

The expression he was 'full of grace' suggests a type of character with qualities of its own, which not only calls forth our admiration, but which leads our thoughts to God. We know each other very imperfectly, and often we judge each other in a half-blind way. But, after all, there are certain features of character which, in a special way, make us think of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the blending, in something like Christlike proportions, of strength and gentleness, of truth and love. It is a character like that of Christ Himself; like it in simple trust in God, and purity of heart, and prompt faithfulness of loving obedience; like it in the pain and indignation caused by falsehood and cruelty and meanness; like it in the love that seeketh not her own, that is not easily provoked, that beareth all things, and hopeth all things.

Grant us such grace that we may work Thy Will
And speak Thy words and walk before Thy Face,
Profound and calm, like waters deep and still:
Grant us such grace.[1]

Being full of grace, he was full of power. The power here indicated was not simply that of working miracles, although these are mentioned, nor was it even intellectual force—the wisdom with which he selected from a memory well-stored with Old Testament scripture, and the cogency with which he drove home his arguments against his opponents in debate,—though that was part of it; it was above all moral force of character, the power which suffers no life where that is to be resultless. For grace in itself is power. Are we not somewhat slow to believe in this kind of power? We believe readily enough in the power of wealth, or of exalted station, or of commanding intellect, or of strong, self-asserting will. These forms of power are obvious; they are self-obtrusive; the commonest mind can discern them. We can understand, too, that Stephen was full of power when he was pressing his antagonists in debate with arguments which they were unable to answer, and they retreated step by step, baffled and silenced, and at last slunk away abashed. We can understand it when we see him bravely standing at bay before the Sanhedrin, holding up history before them as a mirror in which they could see themselves rejecting their Messiah as their fathers had rejected every prophet whom God had ever sent them; and we can understand it again when this pent up feeling at last finds vent in a burst of indignant denunciation, which must have made those men who held his life in their hands quail in his presence. We recognize that there was power there; and perhaps it is not that in us which is most akin to the spirit of Christ which is most quick to appreciate that kind of power; but how slow we are to realize that there was perhaps greater, wider, and more lasting power in the daily round of common duty, in the unnoticed ministries of charities, as he daily wended his way through the lanes and closes of the city among the poor committed to his charge, in his example of patience and self-mastery, in the help he gave by friendly counsel, in the silent influence of his ordinary life.

¶ Before the rush of the day begins, let us take time to gaze for a space into the face of the King; for one whose eyes are open to the invisible, who sees with clear spiritual sight the angels and the angels' Lord beside him, can go on his way with high courage and perfect peace, sure that all is well.

A poor shoemaker once dreamed that the Lord Jesus would visit him on a certain day. He lived in a dark basement room, below the level of the street, and could only see the feet of those who passed by. Several times during the day he saw shabby boots moving wearily past his window, and hurried out to invite the tired wayfarers in for rest and food. All day he watched and waited for the promised Guest, and went sadly to bed at last, thinking that his dream had not come true.

But he dreamed again, and the tired strangers he had cheered and helped stood beside his bed, saying, 'Martin, dost thou not know Me?'

[1] Christina G. Rossetti.

Then he saw in each face a look of the King, and knew that his loved Master had really visited that poor little home many times during the day.

This is not a parable; it is a glorious fact. Christ, in the person of some of His brethren, will surely visit us this day. Are our eyes opened so that we may recognize him? [1]

2. It is in harmony with what we are told of Stephen that we read of that glory upon his face in the great crisis of his life. For grace is the inner beauty of the soul; this was the shining through of that inner beauty.

Think of his situation. He was on trial for his life. The populace was madly excited; his judges were notoriously hostile; around him raged the fury of ignorant fanaticism. And just then, when all turned to gaze upon this monster of impiety (as they deemed him), they beheld no sign of conscious guilt, but a countenance serenely calm, full of the fearlessness that comes from unwavering faith, speaking inward peace unspeakable — a countenance radiant with hope. 'His face as it had been the face of an angel.' Who cares to stop to discuss the question whether this was, in the commonly accepted sense of the word, miraculous? Does not that which is inward ever tend to find for itself outward expression? Do not the habitual emotions and cherished thoughts of the soul record themselves upon the countenance? Does not love in its purest, intensest, most self-sacrificing forms—the love of a mother, for instance—almost glorify? Full of faith in a Saviour risen and living, and in the certainty of His promises; strong, therefore, in the hope which maketh not ashamed; thrilled through his whole soul with the thought of His infinite love, and rejoicing that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for His name; full of faith and hope and love, his face was as it had been the face of an angel.

He heeded not reviling tones,
Nor sold his heart to idle moans,
Tho' cursed and scorn'd, and bruised with stones:

But looking upward, full of grace,
He pray'd, and from a happy place
God's glory smote him on the face.[2]

[1] Dora Farncomb, *The Vision of His Face*, 2.
[2] Tennyson, *The Two Voices*.

¶ The time when I would have liked my father's look to have been perpetuated was that of all others the least likely, or indeed possible; it was when, after administering the Sacrament to his people, and having solemnized every one, and been himself profoundly moved by that Divine, everlasting memorial, he left the elders' seat and returned to the pulpit, and after giving out the psalm, sat down wearied and satisfied, filled with devout gratitude to his Master—his face pale, and his dark eyes looking out upon us all, his whole countenance radiant and subdued. Any likeness of him in this state, more like that of the proto-martyr, when his face was as that of an angel, than anything I ever beheld, would have made one feel what it is so impossible otherwise to convey—the mingled sweetness, dignity, and beauty of his face. When it was winter, and the church darkening, and the lights at the pulpit were lighted so as to fall upon his face and throw the rest of the vast assemblage into deeper shadow, the effect of his countenance was something never to forget.[1]

¶ Our calling is, as branches of the living Vine, to let the working of that Voice, Light, Spirit, and Grace of Christ be shown forth in our own lives; and, as power may be given us, to bear witness of it also in words. . . .

If therefore we have so unassailable a stronghold, so deep and immovable a foundation, let us never cease to look up steadfastly into heaven, if so be we may 'see the heavens opened'; that we may receive into our hearts, and reflect with ever-increasing fullness in our lives the rays of the Sun of Righteousness. The vision may indeed be intercepted again and again by the driving clouds; our sight may fail or falter; but the glory itself is unchangeable, and it is in reflecting that glory alone that any face can be, to those that stand by, 'as the face of an angel'—of a Divinely appointed messenger of glad tidings.[2]

3. The inward likeness to his Lord, so manifest in Stephen's life, was conspicuous in his death.

Our Lord in dying had said, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' Stephen, in his last agony, commits his spirit not directly to the Father, but to Jesus, knowing in whom

[1] J. Brown, *Horæ Subsecivæ*, i. 59.
[2] Caroline E. Stephen.

he has believed, and that He is able to keep that which is committed to Him against that day. And, in showing himself strong in love, Stephen reveals how full his mind and heart are of the thought of his Saviour, and how deeply he has drunk of His Spirit. While the blinding volleys of stones are flying round him, the last effort of his yet clear consciousness is an act of prayer; and the prayer of Jesus for those who were nailing Him to the Cross is echoed in his expiring appeal—'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.'

¶ Mr Frank Lenwood, in his *Forces of the Spirit*, tells this story of a converted drunkard of South India, who had settled down to honest work. 'At the season for reaping he was attacked by bullies, who reaped his field, cut off his fingers with an axe, and decamped with the harvest. The public conscience of the village was roused; they gathered subscriptions to help Abraham to prosecute. The Indian Y.M.C.A. Secretary, who had been the means of his conversion, urged him to go to court and lodge an information, for he knew who the bullies were. Abraham looked at the bags of money and then at his fingerless hands, and after a few moments' silence said: "Sir, just two things would I say to you. You are an educated man; I am an illiterate man. You have been a Christian all your life, and I accepted Jesus not long ago. But when I became His follower I promised to follow in His footsteps. You told me how He was crucified. The nails were driven through His hands and feet. The crown of thorns was placed on His head; but He never said: 'O God, punish My enemies.' His last words were: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' So, just as my Master forgave His enemies and prayed for them, so must I pray for mine and forgive them, for they have done this in the ignorance of their hearts. They did not know anything better."'[1]

This is the only narrative with any fullness of detail of any death in the New Testament, save One. There is scarcely a hint as to how any of the Twelve passed away except the traitor. It is not recorded with what death Peter at last glorified God. We read in a sentence—'Herod killed James, the brother of John, with the sword.' On the career of one who fills a larger space in the history of the Church than any of them the curtain falls before the final sentence is pronounced. In the solitary instance of Stephen is there anything approaching to a description of a dying scene. Is it wrong to infer from this that in the New Testament greater importance is attached to the manner of a man's life than to the manner of a man's death; that in his conquering temptation in living, even more than in his triumphing over fear in dying, is the power of the grace of Christ displayed?

¶ We may sum up the lesson of Stephen's life in some lines found in the Bible of a young Cambridge undergraduate, killed in a railway accident,

> Just as I am, young, strong and free,
> To be the best that I can be,
> For truth and righteousness and Thee,
> Lord of my life—I come, I come.[1]

[1] 'Scribe,' in *The Methodist Recorder*, May 6, 1926.

Responsibility

Acts vii. 60.—'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.'

'LAY not this sin to their charge,' prayed the dying martyr—that is, to the charge of the people who were committing the crime. But if not to their charge then to whose? The prayer raises the whole question of human responsibility.

1. We have the truth of *personal responsibility*. The Bible brushes aside all excuses and sophistries and insists upon it that every sin is a man's own. 'Every man shall give account of himself unto God.' Every man must bear his own burden whatsoever it be. Men have always been ready enough to invent excuses for themselves and to throw the blame for their wrongdoing upon somebody else. When Herod gave the order to kill John the Baptist no doubt he made excuses for himself. He tried to persuade himself it was not his fault. He put the blame on Herodias, on Salome, on the unfortunate circumstances in which he found himself placed. But when the news of Jesus reached him and he imagined Jesus was John come to life again, in that moment of emotion and deadly fear he blurted out the naked truth—'John, whom I beheaded, he is risen

[1] L. Hughes, in *The Churchman's Pulpit*, xiv. 93.

from the dead.' He knew the crime was his own. He could have prevented it had he wished. And in our heart of hearts we all of us make the same acknowledgment.

The Bible bases personal responsibility for sin upon this other truth, that man is free. The Bible holds no terms with the doctrine which represents man as the helpless puppet and plaything of forces over which he has no control. It declares that man is vested with the regal power of will; that he has the faculty of choice; that no man can be driven into sin or evil except by his own consent. As Tennyson puts it,

Man is man, and master of his fate.

That is not simply Tennyson's view, that is the Bible view also. And just because he is 'master of his fate,' just because no one and nothing on earth can constrain him into sin, every sin that he commits is his own, and he himself, and no other, must bear its penalty and blame.

Now, time has not in the slightest degree invalidated this truth of personal responsibility. Every system of law and government in the world proceeds on the supposition that every man's sin is his own. In fact, it is not too much to say that it is this doctrine of personal responsibility which forms the very foundation of moral government and makes our world an ethical world. It is perfectly true that, in these days we are seeing far more clearly than our fathers saw that responsibility is not perhaps the simple thing they thought it to be. We are making far greater allowances for the influence of heredity and environment. And yet, attach what importance we may to heredity and environment, the truth of personal responsibility remains, in the last resort, unassailed and unassailable.

2. We have the truth of *corporate responsibility*. When we say that the sinner is himself to blame we do not exhaust the question of responsibility. The great and striking characteristic of our age is the development of the sense of solidarity. We realize to-day as, perhaps, never before, that man is more than an individual, that he is a social being bound by innumerable ties to other men and women, and influenced by them in all manner of subtle and powerful ways. No man lives to himself; we are all bound up together in the bundle of life. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member rejoices, all the members rejoice with it.

Say not, 'It matters not to me;
My brother's weal is his behoof.'
For in this wondrous human web
If your life's warp, his life is woof.
Woven together are the threads,
And you and he are in one loom;
For good or ill, for glad or sad,
Your lives must share one common doom.

This conception of solidarity, of the vital connection of every individual, not only with the living members of his family and city and nation, but also with the innumerable dead as well, is one of the dominating ideas of our time. And, of course, it profoundly affects our ideas about responsibility. We talk to-day not simply of Individual Responsibility, we talk of Corporate Responsibility and of a Social Conscience. We are beginning to see that it is possible that some others besides the actual sinner may have to bear a share of the responsibility for the sin. Indeed, we are in danger of exaggerating it and pushing it to the falsehood of extremes by the over-emphasis we place upon heredity and environment. Still, corporate responsibility is a solemn truth we do well to recognize. We are our brother's keepers. And it may be that, if we sanction conditions that make it hard to do right and easy to do wrong, God may lay some of the blame for the sins and crimes we deplore in others to our charge.

¶ In his Creole story, *Madame Delphine*, Mr G. W. Cable describes a sermon preached on this text by a Père Jerome in the cathedral of New Orleans. The preacher began by saying that the tender words of God's book are sometimes terrible. 'Notice these, the tenderest words of the tenderest prayer that ever came from the lips of a blessed martyr—the dying words of the holy Saint Stephen, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Is there nothing dreadful in that? Read it thus: "Lord, lay not this sin to *their* charge." Not to the charge of them who stoned him? To whose charge then? Go and ask the holy Saint Paul. Three years afterwards, praying in the Temple at Jerusalem, he answered that question: "I

stood by and consented." He answered for himself only; but the Day must come when all that wicked Council that sent Saint Stephen away to be stoned, and all that city of Jerusalem, must hold up the hand and say, "We also, Lord—we stood by." Ah! friends, under the simpler meaning of that dying Saint's prayer for the pardon of his murderers is hidden the terrible truth that we all have a share in one another's sins.' [1]

(1) What about our English society? Do we not tolerate conditions here in England which make it easy to do wrong and almost impossible to do right? Think for instance of the case of the dwellers in the crowded tenements of the slums. We rejoice that there has been an awakening of the public conscience upon this matter, and that things are better than they were. And yet they remain indescribably bad. Of thousands and tens of thousands of little children, it is still true, to use General Booth's phrase, that they are not so much born as *damned* into the world.

¶ Says Lax of Poplar: 'Think of thousands of families living one family one room! Think of an eight-roomed house with eight adults and thirty-two children—forty in all—living there at one time! Think of the herding together of the sexes among the adolescent boys and girls! Think of the shocking lack of that privacy which decency demands! Think of ten people living and sleeping in one room! Think of the wear and tear on the nervous system of men, women, and children, suffering from lack of light and beauty!'

God will not lay the entire blame for the wreckage at the doors of the dwellers in the slum; He will lay some at our doors for allowing these impossible conditions to exist. It is our fault that the gin-shop is planted at every corner to rob people of their money, to ruin their health, to muddle their brains, and destroy their souls. We have the power to make these things impossible. We can remove these stumbling-blocks from our brother's way. If we neglect to do it, and sit idle and indifferent by, we shall have to share in the responsibility for the ruin of souls.

(2) Let us think of this truth in another way, and show that it has a still more direct and personal application. It was almost a habit with us some years ago to scoff at the doctrine of original sin. Original *guilt* does not commend itself to our common sense or our belief in eternal justice. But in these days we are realizing the truth of *original sin* in a way we have never realized it before. The scientific doctrine of heredity is simply a re-statement in present-day language of the old Bible doctrine of original sin. We are learning to-day that failings, weaknesses, and diseases have a tendency to transmit themselves from parent to child. We have known for long enough that physical weakness is so transmitted. But we realize in these days that moral characteristics transmit themselves as well. The 'inherited burden' is a terrible and tragic fact in the history of many a child. You remember the old Greek legend says that the mighty hero Achilles was vulnerable only in his heel, and that was where his mother Thetis held him. And many a child is vulnerable where the sin of his father or mother grips him. That is the weak spot. It was by an arrow in his heel that Achilles at length was killed. It is often by means of the inherited weakness that the devil gets the better of men to-day. If a man falls, and falls for that reason, who will be to blame? The old doctrine of original sin taught that children shared in the guilt of their parents. The modern doctrine reverses all that, and teaches that parents may have to bear some share of responsibility for the sins of the children.

There stands the solemn truth—written large over the face of human life: We share in the responsibility for others' sin. Does it not make us feel that one of the most urgent needs of our time is that of a development and quickening of the *social conscience*? Evil is wrought in these days of ours for want of thought as well as for want of heart. That is why gigantic wrongs are allowed to flourish in England, and to go on taking their toll of lives and souls; we have not realized that these things were any part of our business. But they *are* our business. We should make straight paths for the feet of our weaker brothers and sisters, that that which is lame be not turned out of the way, but rather be healed.

[1] J. Moffatt, in *The Expositor*, March, 1919.

Stephen the Martyr

Acts vii. 60.—'And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.'

The defence of Stephen struck the keynote of Christian freedom, traced out the fair proportions of the Catholic Church, while the actual martyrdom of Stephen taught men that Christianity was not only the force which was to triumph, but the power in which they were to suffer, and bear, and die. Stephen's career was a type of all martyr lives, and embraces every possible development through which Christ's Church and His servants had afterwards to pass—obscurity, fame, activity, death—fixing high the standard for all ages.

The illegality of the proceeding is beyond dispute, for, on the admission of the chief priests themselves, the Sanhedrin had no power to put to death; but it is not necessary to view it at all in the light of a judicial action. It was an outbreak of mob violence on the part of the leaders of the nation, which could easily be disavowed, if necessary, by the Council. But they probably felt assured of their safety, for there is every reason to believe that it took place during the interregnum which ensued on the recall of Pilate.

The Sanhedrin had listened up to a point with some patience to Stephen's defence, but, when they fully understood his allusive treatment of ancient history, that body of august elders became wild with a frenzy of indignation, lost to all sense of their dignity. They gnash with their teeth, in default of further argument. What is it that infuriates them? It is not the sharp reproof which the prisoner at the bar has just delivered against them. Judges never get excited by the insolence of condemned prisoners. What excites them in this singular way is that what the prisoner has just said is true.

The prisoner meantime is calm and serene, his face like an angel's. At the outset of his address he spoke of his God as the God of glory, and when his testimony was ended that glory was openly revealed to him. For such a vision it was worth while to die. 'I see,' he said, 'the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.' The same priests who had declared the Saviour's words to be blasphemy now witnessed their accomplishment for the comfort of the first martyr. And indeed they were more than accomplished. Stephen alone of the first saints speaks of Christ as the Son of Man, according to the title which Christ gave Himself, as though he was cheered by some peculiar exhibition of His humanity; and the Lord Jesus whom he saw was not sitting to judge, but standing to help and welcome. The end came quickly. The prisoner was thrust out of the courthouse and down to the valley of Hinnom. The hail of pitiless stones falls upon him until he is overborne, pressed to the ground. The image of his Master's Passion fell upon his own. Like Him he had been accused by false witnesses; like Him he had been condemned for a spontaneous testimony to the truth; like Him he prayed for his murderers—'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.' And with that last heavenward look he fell asleep.

Easier
To rest on pillows
Filled with sweet, soft lies—
Than gird on love
And contend with the crowd!

Easier
Smooth sophistries, silk
Proppings, coverings—peace,
Than Stephen's stones
To fall asleep among!

(But Who
Stood there to say
To Stephen, bloody,
Torn, and shining-faced;
'Welcome! Well done'?)[1]

What were some of the consequences of Stephen's death?

1. There is the effect of persecution upon the Christians themselves. It put out of the Church those who were merely lukewarm, or were secretly treacherous. Persecution purified the body; it tested and deepened its convictions. The Church of Jerusalem was for the moment dispersed by the death of Stephen, and by the persecution which followed. It was dispersed only that it might re-assemble with larger hopes and with grander experiences—that it might

[1] P. E. Wells, in *The British Weekly*, June 18, 1925.

expand from an unknown community in a provincial city to be the world-embracing home of souls. And this fact alone is sufficient to show the criminal folly of persecution in all who name the name of Christ. To recognize the converting office of God the Holy Spirit is to feel at once that persecution is a crime, since it is an attempt to achieve by outward and mechanical violence results which, to be worth anything whatever before God, can only be the product of His converting grace.

Another beautiful consequence of the Church's sufferings was that Christians became tender and sympathetic to sufferers everywhere. It was the period of persecution which, first and foremost, made the brotherhood of burden-bearers a forceful and a fateful reality; and it was the sufferings to which Christians were subject continually that gave to the Church that intense sympathy with the desolate and downtrodden, the tried and troubled, the sick and sorrowful, the outcast and the slave, the victims everywhere of injustice and oppression, the miserable and the misunderstood—a sympathy which it is her chief glory never to have cast away.

2. As for the influence of the persecution of the Christians upon the world, it is easy to imagine what this would be. There is something in us which cannot but respond to the sight of suffering borne in meekness. Suffering is power, at least when it is voluntary. The sight of a fellow-creature meeting pain and death, from which he might escape if he would, and for some motive which is perhaps only half comprehended by the bystanders—this stirs in all of us a fellow-feeling which belongs to our common nature. Yes, suffering is power, and this power is great in proportion to the sacrifice which the suffering involves. The voluntary death of the very old, and the involuntary death of the very young touch us less than the spectacle of a young man just reaching the maturity of his faculties, conscious of what they mean and what they promise, yet willingly resigning them by a painful death which it is in his power to decline.

Men scoff at the terrible power for God that lies in non-resistance, in submission; but the world has never really put that power to the test. You cannot go on smiting an unresisting face. That smitten face becomes for you the face of God.

¶ When Gandhi was in South Africa carrying on his passive resistance movement against the South African Government (which struggle, by the way, he won) the indentured coolies in whose behalf he was fighting with non-violent weapons got out of hand again and again. He remonstrated, but all to no avail. Finally, without word, he went off and began to fast. He had fasted for two days when word went around among the coolies that Gandhi was fasting because of what they were doing. That changed matters immediately. They came to him with folded hands and begged him to desist from the fast, promising him that they would do anything if only he would stop it. Suffering love had conquered.[1]

And what blessing, what disturbance, what sense of God and Christ and the urgent business of the heavenly powers did persecution bring to the hearts of those who persecuted? Let us read on. 'And . . . [they] ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.' Saul, that is to say, saw Stephen die. Saul never saw anything else. That was the end of Saul. Of course, he did not know that in that moment something had come to the end of itself within him, and something new had come into being. He did not know that the stones which slew Stephen had slain him. He thought at the moment that that was the end of Stephen. But it was only the beginning of the reign of Stephen and of the reign of Him for whom Stephen had laid down his life. The death of Stephen was the death of that young man named Saul. He was a young man no longer. He supposed that he was the same. But he was baptized in the blood of Stephen and ordained by God that day.

¶ Not so many years ago, on the Quai Valmy in Paris, there was a meeting being held in a little hall, a meeting to seek holiness from God; and about the door there was a multitude of raging Parisian roughs, the mad devil's-brood, produced in the city by a century of atheism. At the door of the hall is a young Frenchman, Jean Monod, holding the door, trying to protect the women and the children who enter the hall from their unbridled violence. As he stands there, he is suddenly stricken by one of the savages, and he falls, not to rise again.

[1] E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, 97.

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Before dying he says, 'Oh, heaven is beautiful! It is good to sing. Sing to me, "Thou art love, my God."' And the hymn is sung by his comrades. Then with his hand in the hand of that brave young English woman who had gone over to Paris to face the demons that atheism had raised—with his hand in her hand, and gently murmuring to himself, 'It is too beautiful! It is too beautiful!' he dies.

An unbeliever present, a godless Parisian, whom nothing hitherto had ever moved, was brought to God by the sight; brought down on his knees in penitence before the Christ for whom Monod was dying, he yielded his heart to the Saviour who died for him.[1]

Self-Effacement and Self-Assertion

Acts viii. 9.—'Giving out that himself was some great one.'

1. Simon of Samaria—Simon Magus as he is generally called—is the central figure of an episode in the Acts which, brief as it is, has attracted men's attention in almost every age of Christianity. During the first three centuries various legends grew up about his subsequent history. Unconverted and hardened, he is said to have gone to Rome, where he preached a religion of his own invention. Somewhere about the fourth century is found the first mention of the offence of 'simony,' and the sale of spiritual offices was destined to become a grievous canker in the mediæval Church.

¶ Dante leaves us in no doubt as to the view which he took of simony. In the *Inferno* he assigns a special place and an appalling form of punishment to those who had been guilty of this sin. It is they who have prostituted the things of God for gold and silver, and made 'His house a den of thieves.' Dante is carried down by his Guide to the bottom of the chasm where they lie; and there finds Pope Nicholas the Third, who, with a weeping voice, declares his own evil ways, and those of his successors, Boniface the Eighth and Clement the Fifth.

'I know not if here I was too hardy, for I answered him in this strain: Ah! Now tell me how much treasure our Lord required of St Peter, before He put the keys into his keeping? Surely He demanded nought but "Follow me"! Nor did Peter, nor the others, ask of Matthias gold or silver, when he was chosen for the office which the guilty soul had lost. Therefore stay thou *here*, for thou art justly punished.'[1]

[1] R. F. Horton.

Simon Magus gave himself out to be 'some great one,' and, as is often the case, was taken at his own valuation. We know nothing about the nature of his magic, but he clearly did not pose as a mere conjurer. He professed occult and even Divine powers, and had greatly impressed the people of Samaria with the reality of his claims. Not merely the ignorant poor but the leading officials of the place gave heed to him and spoke of him as the great power of God. It was in the middle of this success that Philip came to Samaria. The popularity of Simon began to wane, and with all the adroitness of a thorough man of the world he threw himself into the new movement. He was baptized and joined Philip, hoping no doubt to discover how the signs and wonders were worked. Afterwards, on the arrival of Peter and John, feeling that their manifestations far exceeded anything that he could do himself, he offered to purchase their secret. He could not believe that there was anything which money would not buy. But for once the knowledge of the world on which he prided himself played him false, and he received a rebuke from Peter which seems to have thoroughly frightened him.

¶ Not one of the gifts of God may be purchased with money—not honour, not love, not peace of conscience, not even the respect of our fellow-men. 'If a man would give all the substance of his house for love it would utterly be contemned.' You buy a book, but there is something in the book that you cannot buy. It becomes yours in one sense, while in another it may never be yours at all. You may handle in pride of possession the material form and substance of your purchase, but not the book of the poet or the thinker. There is something here which you may never be able to call your own, and that is the priceless thing about the book. So of the salvation of God in Christ.[2]

Men of the stamp of Simon Magus, though exceptional, are by no means uncommon. They reappear time after time in history.

[1] J. A. Carlyle, *Dante's Inferno*.
[2] Hubert L. Simpson, *Put Forth by the Moon*, 149.

Their leading characteristic is their self-assertion. Like Theudas, who is mentioned in Gamaliel's speech in the Acts, they boast themselves to be somebody. We can all recall examples of a similar type, such as Brigham Young, for instance, or Harris (the man who so strangely influenced Laurence Oliphant), or, more recently, Dowie. Such men live by their self-assertiveness and self-advertisement, and as a general rule they trade on the weaknesses of mankind.

2. Very different from this type of prophet in tone and temper are the prophets of the Old Testament. As we read them we see that they are absolutely free from any desire to assert their own authority. They draw the clearest distinction between themselves and the Divine message which they are commissioned to deliver. They are content to sink their own personality, to be mere mouthpieces. 'Thus saith the Lord' is the constant burden of their prophecy. They are never guilty of that obtrusive self-appreciation which sometimes spoils good work. The greatest of them records with pathetic humility that he is a man of unclean lips. There is something noble in the idea that there is no room for a man's personal self-assertion when the advocacy of a great cause has been committed to him. Moses was willing that his own name should be blotted out provided that the people might be forgiven. We find a similar acceptance of the duty of self-effacement in John the Baptist, when he says of Christ, 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' He is content to play the part of the prologue in the great drama of redemption, and to quit the stage when the chief actor enters.

¶ He frequently referred to John the Baptist's answer to the question, 'Who art thou?' 'I am a voice,' as being the model for all time. Most truly he took to himself the advice he gave: 'We must efface ourselves if we would proclaim Christ.'[1]

¶ Danton once thrilled the National Convention by exclaiming, 'Reputation! O what is the reputation of this man or of that? Let my name be blighted; only let France be free.'

3. It is this same spirit of self-effacement for the sake of a great cause which lies at the bottom of the mediatorial sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. He accepted poverty and humiliation for His earthly lot. He was despised and rejected of men. Might we not even say that in respect of His purely human nature His name was for a moment blotted out of God's book? Listen to Him repeating on the Cross the opening verse of the Twenty-second Psalm, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' He was content to sink His Divine Personality in earthly shame and spiritual desolation, in scorn from men and in abandonment by God. Let us never forget this great fact of Christ's voluntary self-effacement. It is true that He also clearly and continually asserted His authority and personality. He claimed to be the Messiah, He claimed to have power to forgive sins, He claimed to be Himself without sin, He claimed to be the source of life and light. Such self-assertion as this would rightly be called overweening if there were nothing to justify it. But suppose He were really God, could He help making the claim that He stood in a unique relation to His Heavenly Father? His self-assertion might be called official, if we may reverently use such a phrase: it was a necessary consequence of His unique position as Son of the Father. His self-effacement might on the other hand be said to express His personal choice. Had any one been told beforehand that God was about to appear on earth, would not one have expected to see a kingly figure radiant with Divine majesty? Not such was the choice of the Lord of Glory. For our sakes He cometh poor.

> He held the highest place above,
> Adored by sons of flame,
> Yet such His self-denying love,
> He laid aside His Crown, and came
> To seek the lost, at any cost
> Of Heavenly rank, and earthly fame,
> He sought me—Blessed be His Name.

4. The combination of self-effacement with self-assertion which characterised Christ's earthly life finds its counterpart in the lives of His followers. We live in an age of which we may not unfairly say that self-assertiveness is its dominant note. Push, determination, self-advertisement are the qualities which the world recommends as conditions of success to

[1] *Dr M'Laren of Manchester*, 211.

the man who is beginning his career. Could anything be more entirely at variance with the example and the teaching of Jesus Christ? He bids His followers put aside both the end which the worldly man sets before himself and the means whereby he seeks to attain it. The Christian's ideal of success is something far above riches or fame or earthly power, and he seeks to realise it, not by self-assertion or self-advertisement, but by self-discipline, by quiet, unobtrusive service, by distrust of popularity, and by childlike humble-mindedness.

¶ At nineteen years of age F. W. Robertson made several resolves—among them this: 'To try to despise the principle of the day, "Every man his own trumpeter"; and to feel it a degradation to speak of my own doings, as a poor braggart.' How he hated self-puffing and self-advertisement! How pained he was at being considered 'the popular preacher of a fashionable watering-place'! How his whole soul loathed any ideal of the Christian minister other than the very highest![1]

In making their protest against worldly methods and worldly aims Christians sometimes perhaps are led to over-emphasize the duty of self-effacement. Exaggeration on this subject does a good deal of harm. It leads to accusations that the Christian makes a claim to be indifferent to worldly success which is unreal and hypocritical. Offer him a big post or a lucrative position, it is sometimes cynically said, and see whether he will not jump at it. But does Christ enjoin on His followers the duty of cutting themselves off from all the honourable ambitions of life? He warns them that riches are a snare. He forbids His disciples to seek out the chief places. He tells them that true greatness consists in service. He tells them that the Kingdom of Heaven consists of such as are childlike in character. But there is nothing in His teaching which implies that Christian self-effacement and humility involve making what Dante calls the great refusal. It would be a serious thing for human society if good men were debarred by Christianity from the opportunity of doing good work in important and responsible positions. It is one thing for a man not to put himself forward: it is another to refuse to accept the opportunity of leadership, if in the judgment of competent people he is thought well qualified. True self-effacement is not outward but inward. It is not the refusal of a post of dignity which comes unsought; it is the refusal to consider the dignity the important thing in the post, the refusal to let oneself be uplifted by it.

It is a great mistake to suppose that all self-assertion is wrong. There are occasions when the Christian is bound to assert himself. However retiring he may be by disposition, however much he may dislike thrusting himself forward, he is bound on occasion to put his foot down by way of protest against monstrous oppression or scandalous wickedness. As to the necessity of doing this on any particular occasion he must come to a decision for himself after prayer for guidance. But there are certainly situations when to be silent is to make oneself an accomplice. And from another point of view is it not true that the Christian can hardly help asserting himself and impressing his personality on other people without in the least meaning to do so? His character must tell. His light inevitably shines before men. He cannot help his quiet example influencing those around him. That unconscious form of self-assertion is one of the most remarkable facts in life, and its effect is all the greater because it is so free from self-advertisement.

¶ A friend of mine went into a shoe shop and found the Hindu shopkeeper in deep distress. He had lost his only son. My friend to comfort him said, 'Well, my brother, remember in your trouble that God is love.' The Hindu's face brightened up and he said, 'Yes, I know God is love.' My friend, interested at his evident eagerness, asked, 'How do you know God is love?' 'Oh,' said the Hindu, 'I worked for Foy sahib in Cawnpore, and no one could work for Foy sahib and not know God is love.'[1]

[1] J. Flew, *Saints of Yesterday*, 199.

The Story of a Seeker

Acts viii. 27.—'And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia.'

PHILIP the deacon was a great evangelist. Only one or two scenes in his obedient and strenuous career find a place in the panorama of Acts; but these make it clear that he was

[1] E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, 183.

a man of whom, had there been space enough, the New Testament might well have told us a great deal more.

For a man who loves his business there is always work in plenty; hence on the arrival of Peter and John to take up the leadership in Samaria, Philip set out for a new field. Travelling directly south, and striking the Gaza road near the desert, he reached the post assigned him. And there he waited. Presently down the highway came the royal treasurer of Ethiopia, a numerous retinue most likely in his train; and as he drew near Philip was made inwardly aware that his business was with this stranger. Possibly he thought it odd at first that he should have been hurried away from a wonderful revival in Samaria merely to talk to one man; but, however that may be, his faith was too loyal and too robust to ask questions, or to disobey orders because they had rather a quixotic look. When the angel of the Lord said: 'Go toward the south' this is the simple record which follows: 'And he arose and went.'

1. There is something very noble in this courtier. There is a touch of true greatness in the man. In a heathen court, and with everything against him, his life had grown into a great cry for God. Somehow he had got his hands on the Old Testament. Never a Jewish trader came to Meroë, where Queen Candace held sway, but the chancellor had earnest converse with him; until at last nothing would ease his heart but the resolve to journey to Jerusalem. The Temple was there, and the priests and scribes were there, would he not learn there all that he craved for? And now he is returning homeward, a somewhat baffled, unsatisfied man. He must still seek, he must still read, he must still study. He was deep in Isaiah as he journeyed along that desert road, reading aloud, as the Eastern way is.

In the circumstances nothing was more natural than for Philip, the lonely traveller, to join the larger caravan; and as he moved close up to the chariot, he heard the treasurer reading that deep and moving lyric of vicarious sorrow, the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which delineates the sufferings of the Servant of the Lord. Soon the tones of mystification in the reader's voice grew more appealing, and very quietly and unobtrusively Philip threw in a question that really meant, 'You don't understand what you are reading, do you?' Most people resent the faintest allusion to their ignorance, even though it is prompted by the kindliest motives; but this man was too much in earnest for affectations of that sort. Philip's question drew a frank answer; and thereupon a kind of sudden friendship sprang up between the two men. Each felt that the other was the man he needed.

¶ How afraid we all are of religious talk! How we pride ourselves on our reserve, and how ready we are to freeze up any warm, eager soul who is not quite so taciturn as we are! There was an Indian gentleman who once came to this country because he had been filled with an insatiable desire to learn all he could about immortality, and he supposed people in England could tell him something. He went to London, and to his neighbour at table one evening he said: 'I should like to know what you think about immortality.' He received the answer, 'Ah! in this country we don't talk about these subjects at dinner'; and that was the end.[1]

2. It was the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah that Philip made his text that day. It is one of the holiest spots in all the Bible. We, as we read it, feel the wondrous tenderness and power with which it portrays Christ's sacrifice, and all the virtue of His redeeming sympathy. Just then the Ethiopian knew nothing of all that; yet he too was melted and subdued by the picture of the Man of Sorrows. He read once more the description of the great Sin-bearer—the verses in which it is clearly predicted of Him that His greatness is the result of His being, not the founder of a new school of thought, or the leader of a social reformation, nor even possessed of personal saintliness, but of His being a Sufferer. And in view of this description, so moving in its mystery, he asked the question, going right to the heart of things: Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Yes; *the* question for religious faith, the question best worth asking, and the answer to which answers at the same time all the others, is just that which confronts us here: Who is the Bearer of human sin?

[1] H. R. Mackintosh.

'Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.' He would, in all probability, tell him first of the Resurrection; then, as the background of that, snatches from the story of Christ's life, and some of His most gracious parables, and perhaps a few of His best remembered sayings. Yet, whatever else he told him, he would inevitably tell him of the Cross—its meaning, its issues, its glory. And so it was that by the strong pleading of the outward voice, and the gracious power of the Spirit inwardly, the Ethiopian was brought to look to the Crucified, to desire Him, to reach out empty hands of longing after Him; until, as the chariot rolled on its unconscious way, then and there he yielded himself to the new constraining Presence, and began to love a Saviour he had never seen.

¶ Archdeacon Wilson describes the experience of the promoters of a certain evening-class, which they had instituted for the benefit of some of the more ignorant and degraded inhabitants of Bristol. All that they could think of they did for the benefit of the men who gathered to it. They read to them: they sang to them: they taught them to read and write. Yet, in course of time, interest flagged. Every expedient failed, and they were on the point of abandoning the work in despair, when it occurred to them to apply to the men themselves. 'What would you like us to tell you about next?' they asked. 'Could you tell us something about Jesus Christ?' answered one of the men.[1]

Begin from first where He encradled was
In simple cratch, wrapt in a wad of hay,
Between the toilful ox and humble ass,
And in what rags, and in how base array,
The glory of our heavenly riches lay,
When Him the silly shepherds came to see,
Whom greatest princes sought on lowest knee.

From thence read on the story of His life,
His humble carriage, His unfaulty ways,
His cancred foes, His fights, His toil, His strife,
His pains, His poverty, His sharp assays,
Through which He passed His miserable days,
Offending none, and doing good to all,
Yet being maliced both of great and small.

[1] G. Milligan in *Men of the Bible*, 243.

Then shalt thou feel thy spirit so possessed,
And ravished with devouring great desire
Of His dear self, that shall thy feeble breast
Inflame with love, and set thee all on fire
With burning zeal, through every part entire,
That in no earthly thing thou shalt delight,
But in His sweet and amiable sight.[1]

3. On the swift conversion followed, as swiftly, an eager confession of new faith. Everywhere in that day, as in heathenism still, the obvious and natural mode in which a man could signify his personal belief in Jesus was an open and deliberate submission to the rite of baptism. None of the elements of publicity was lacking now; one can see the officers and servants of the retinue crowding round to watch and comment and remember. In some pool or streamlet by the wayside, then, the sacrament took place, and the new disciple took the words of Christian confession on his lips. Let us not miss the significance of the fact that all was done with such openness. Who could say that the act would not be reported against him in the homeland, and used by an enemy for his hurt? Yet he was willing to take the risk of it, gladly accepting the ventures which are inseparable from loyalty; and how much strength his faith and purpose would draw from that brave deed of confession one can dimly guess. It would nerve his arm thus to hear his own voice lifted in solemn avowal; it always does. It is when we have crossed the river, and burnt our boats behind us, that God makes us strong through confidence in His power, and men see in our eyes the light of a fire that glows within.

¶ Professor Rufus Jones tells us in his autobiography how he made the public avowal of his faith, and what it cost him to make it. 'Here I was,' he says, 'a boy among a great group of boys who had followed my lead in a hundred boyish pranks. I could not take a step without breaking a thousand threads which wove my life into the past and bound me up with this society of my fellows. There were days of this seething struggle during which I felt that my entire future was at stake. At length one night there came a bursting point, and I arose with every artery in me throbbing and my heart pounding so hard that I thought

[1] Spenser.

everybody must hear it. With a tremendous effort I made my tongue say, "I want to be a Christian." Nobody laughed; it was still and solemn. I knew I had won my first great spiritual victory. I had made my aspiration "public," in the presence of my old companions.'

'I still found,' he adds, 'that the old self was far from dead, and that I often slipped back into the ways I had left. The new land was in sight, and yet the cables which bound me to the old shores were not entirely cut. But this much must be said, that after that memorable day in the schoolhouse I never had any doubt that God was for me, or any permanent sense that He would let go of me.'[1]

4. When they were come up out of the water, 'the eunuch went on his way rejoicing.' Nothing in the wonderful story is more amazing. *Rejoicing*—what was there to rejoice about? He was going back to a dark savage land, the only Christian in the country; he was going back to spiritual isolation and into the midst of fierce temptations to apostasy; he was going back, quite probably, to persecution and to death. He had only a few stray leaves of the Old Testament; he knew very little of Christian truth; and even Philip, who had led him to God, was now called away. Yet he went on his way rejoicing; and perhaps in some little wonder we ask the reason why.

And yet, is it so very difficult to understand? The Ethiopian had found Jesus Christ, and realized Christ's personal love for him; and we may be sure that, whatever else he understood of Christian doctrine, he knew this, that Christ had become his inseparable companion for ever and for ever. Far away in distant Ethiopia he would never feel forsaken or bewildered any more, for the great secret was now his. And therefore, as he went his way back into the heathen darkness, perhaps to meet a cruel fate, it was with a soul made brave and glad by the presence that solves all difficulties and satisfies all hearts.

[1] Rufus M. Jones, *Finding the Trail of Life*, 115.

The Ethiopian and the Old Testament

Acts viii. 27, 28.—'A man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.'

This is the story of an Ethiopian who had been at Jerusalem to worship. It was a far cry from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. The capital of Queen Candace lay on the remoter Nile, over 1200 miles from the capital of Judah. More than the distance, however, was what came between. Twelve hundred miles would be nothing to a man in search of religion, especially if he were of the patient and inquiring disposition which we see in this Ethiopian. But the wonder was that the greater extent of these 1200 miles lay across Egypt—the most religious and fascinating civilization of the time. Hosts of pilgrims sought Egypt from distances greater than Ethiopia. Her temples still spread their unbroken splendour across her sunny provinces: their roofs, the platforms of gorgeous ritual and processions, that, flashing, drew the eyes of the people from leagues across the level country. It was the most visible religion that ever tempted the desire of the eyes. But for the mind it had subtler attractions still. While she paraded her idols before the crowd, Egypt took the thinker by the hand, led him into an inner chamber, and whispered to him of the One God.

How was it, then, that this earnest pilgrim passed it all by, esteeming the religion of the little tribe of Judah greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt? The secret, of course, lay in his knowledge of a single book, for the religion of Israel had no other means than this of attempting the influence which Egypt exerted through her gorgeous ritual and vast literature. This book is known to us as the Old Testament, and is commended to us by Jesus Christ as the revelation of His God and Father. But what would it have been to such a man as this Ethiopian, who had not heard of Christ? He had read it probably in the Greek version, which circulated throughout Egypt, and may easily have penetrated with the Greek language to the realms of Queen Candace. To him it was, at first sight, but a collection of histories, laws, psalms, and addresses called prophecies. They had come

from various ages, some of them from far-back centuries. But they were all Jewish and all connected by one idea, the idea of a special covenant between God and the Hebrew nation. When we consider this central claim of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as the uncompromising spirit with which it is so often urged, we may wonder that any man who was not a Jew ever found his way as a worshipper to Jerusalem.

What, then, prevailed with the Ethiopian and led him—as Christian was led past the lions to the Palace Beautiful—past all obstacles to the secret place of Jehovah? What is it that has given the Old Testament religion its unique and unapproached influence among the religions of the world? What binds this book to Christ, and makes us feel it to be part of the same Divine revelation?

Is it that it claims to be the Word of God? So claim the sacred books of every other nation upon earth. Is it that it is verbally accurate and infallibly true in matters of history? That is not a question which the Ethiopian was likely to have put; but if he had stopped to answer it before coming to Jerusalem he would never have found God at all. Is it that all the predictions of fact which the Old Testament makes have been fulfilled? On the contrary, the time at which this Ethiopian came to Jerusalem was not a time of the fulfilment of prophecy, but one in which history and providence seemed to go utterly against the predictions of Scripture.

Putting aside these things, let us grasp at what the Old Testament essentially is, at what it most urgently offers to us. This is plainly a Revelation of the living God—of His Person, His Character, and His Will.

1. In the Hebrew religion—and in this alone among Semitic systems of faith—there was a principle of selection that separated clean from unclean in Hebrew worship, and an inspiration that rendered Hebrew prophecy the unique moral phenomenon which it evidently is in human history. When we turn to ask whence this came we find the answer in the character of the God of Israel. Each of the laws of the sanctuary is accompanied by the reason, *For I am holy*. And when we ask the prophets for the source of their unique doctrines of God, their testimony is that they received them in personal communication with their God, whose peculiar character is that, as Isaiah said, He is 'holy, holy, holy, God high and lifted up.' Which of us that has sought any part of this old Book with spiritual heart and quick conscience has not felt as Isaiah felt when he entered Solomon's temple—has not felt everything peculiarly Jewish disappear, and the house fill only with the presence of the living God, and the heart give way before the majesty of His holiness! But it was the virtue of a great prophet like Isaiah not to remain contented with the vision, but to bring it to bear on the history of his people. It is the character of Jehovah that draws His people from among the nations of their peculiar destiny; it is that character which selects and builds the Law that is as a hedge around them in the midst of heathendom; it is that which, in each revelation, discovers to the people alike the measure of their delinquency and degradation and of the new ideals of their service to humanity.

2. The God of Israel is not only holy, but *sovereign*; not only the Example and Conscience of Israel, but the Judge, Executor, and Vindicator of righteousness in the history of the world; not only the Ideal of morality, but the moral Governor of the world, who makes purity and happiness, justice and victory, sin and failure to coincide. On this familiar and evident feature of the Old Testament—the people's conviction in the darkest periods of their history, and the mainspring of the most glorious hopes that have ever leapt to bring heaven down to earth—there is no need to linger further than to point out that it gives us the explanation of one of the most difficult and forbidding features of the Hebrew religion. The cursing Psalms have scared away from the Old Testament many to whom, on the contrary, their very curses should have been only an attraction. For they are at least the witness that in the Old Testament we have to do, not with mere dreamers of a heavenly ideal of justice, but with men actually engaged in the struggle for righteousness, with all the real passions of their manhood. They are inspired by the conviction that God will deal justice upon the wicked man and the tyrant. They were written in periods when that justice was delayed and the hearts of the people were starved by a famine of righteousness.

¶ God's justice has been the hope of the oppressed in all ages. It is the hope of those who are trodden down to-day. It will work in this world and the next, until all wrongs are righted, till that which is crooked shall have been made straight, till the hills are levelled and the valleys exalted. We sing with Whittier—

> We only know that God is just,
> And every wrong shall die.

We exclaim with Queen Katharine—

> Heaven is above all yet; there sits a judge
> That no king can corrupt.

3. But after emphasizing the holiness of God, and His power as Judge in the history of the world, we are not yet in possession of the whole secret of the Old Testament. The highest moral ideal is the righteousness which is *militant and agonizing*, not that which is regnant only. To will righteousness, and in its favour to rule life from above, is indeed Divine; but, if these were the highest attributes of Divinity, and if these exhausted the Divine interest in us, then man himself, with his conscience and capacity to sacrifice himself on behalf of justice and truth, would indeed be higher than his God. But the God of the Old Testament is not such a God. In the moral warfare to which He has predestined His creatures, He Himself descends to participate. The sins of men are not only the object of His hate; they are the grief of His heart. That very feature of the Hebrew Scriptures for which they are so often despised by unthinking people—that they too much represent the Deity as clothed in the armour and moved by the passions of men—is their glory in so far as they thereby meet humanity's unquenchable desire for a God who is not mere abstract Holiness or only Sovereign Justice, but One who travails in pain for their growth in holiness; and who meets them with the age-long sufferance that gradually softens their hearts and develops their minds.

> The Judge endures man's age-long woes;
> Though patient, yet not careless He:
> 'Whatever ye have done to those
> My brethren, ye have done to Me.'
>
> Behold in saint and prophet slain
> The suffering Seed of God oppressed;
> He bears the pining prisoner's chain,
> The martyr's torment tears His breast.
>
> Not vain the anguish nobly borne
> For sake of right and truth's demands;
> 'Tis love that wears the crown of thorn,
> And healing drops from piercèd hands.
>
> Bereft of God the Sufferer seems,
> Despised, rejected; hear His cry!
> But light behind the darkness gleams;
> The unfelt God is yet most nigh,
>
> Himself the Sufferer: Calvary's hill
> Reveals redemption and its price;
> Love conquers yet by bearing ill,
> And saves the world by sacrifice.[1]

With what power of assurance did the message of forgiveness come to sinful men from such a God! And with what new moral force does pardon come from such a God; what horror of sin it must breed in the sinner; how it must infect his soul with God's own travail and sorrow for sin; how it must send him away to be, in the example of his God, an enemy of sin and a warrior against it!

4. These, then, are the facts about the Old Testament which may be said to have drawn this Ethiopian. So we may judge him to have found God in His Scriptures, and to have been won by those voices that go home to the individual heart of man with irresistible force. The vision of this God wakened his conscience; the urgency of that love persuaded his heart to faith: all that grace was borne home to himself on some particular promise. On the strength of it he arose, and went and joined himself to the chosen people of God; he offered the sacrifices of righteousness, and his name was enrolled in the book of the living.

Surely he had now fulfilled to him the whole promise of the Scriptures. But no, as he returned from Jerusalem, he continued to read, and, reading, lighted on a passage which, however full of those truths which we have supposed to have drawn him to Jerusalem, pointed beyond all that he had found there in the Temple or in its system of worship.

[1] E. Grubb, *The Light of Life*, 23.

This passage placed all the people on one side in trespass and guilt, the Servant alone on the other in absolute holiness. It owned that, though holy, He made the people's sins His conscience and His burden. Thus in two respects the Servant of the Lord was like God Himself: He knew no sin; and He made His people's sin His concern and His agony. But the confession also declared that the Servant was to be in place of all those sacrifices for the putting away of sin which the living God, in His concern for men's sins, had instituted. 'Of whom,' said the Ethiopian to the teacher God had sent him in his difficulty, 'of whom did the prophet write this, of himself or of another?'

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. We cannot wonder that one who had already come so far to worship Jehovah should recognize Jehovah in Jesus Christ. In all points He was that living God whom the Old Testament revealed—that living God in His holiness, His love, His passion.

And for what else do *we* come to Christ, but this, that in His character and word and work He realizes all the highest and most constraining that has ever been revealed to us concerning God? It is this, that the whole fullness of God, as far as our thoughts can bear it, as far as our needs have fathomed it, appears in Him.

¶ No one claims that Jesus was the complete revelation of the intellect of God, or of His æsthetic nature, or of His multitudinous relations with the universe. But when we come to character, to what God really *is*, if we agree with Jesus that God is long-suffering, forgiving, redeeming, self-giving love, there is nothing we can think of in God that we do not possess in Jesus. We say to Him, as the psalmist to Jehovah: 'Thou art my God, I have no good beyond Thee.' We look at Jesus in all His relations with men, and supremely when He hangs on the cross, and we are compelled to confess, 'Behold our God! That is what we mean by the word "God."' In Jesus dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. What more can there be?

> Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
> More than all in Thee I find.[1]

[1] H. S. Coffin.

The Teaching of Christ's Silence

Acts viii. 32.—'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before his shearer is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth' (R.V.).

Thus read the Treasurer of Queen Candace. And when Philip joined himself to the chariot, 'Of whom speaketh the prophet this?' he asked. Whereupon Philip, beginning from this Scripture, preached unto him Jesus.

Philip knew nothing of the controversy about the Suffering Servant of the Lord. But he knew Jesus. He knew that, only a few years before, Jesus had stood His trial, first before the Jewish High Priest, next before the Roman procurator, and then before the tetrarch of Galilee; and that at each trial, standing as a lamb before His shearer, He opened not His mouth. So he began from this scripture. He felt, no doubt, that a more appropriate scripture from which to preach Jesus could scarcely have been given into his hands.

Jesus 'opened not his mouth.' First He was tried by Caiaphas and the Jewish Sanhedrin. And when the witnesses bore false witness against Him, 'the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace and answered nothing.' Then they brought Him before Pilate. The Roman governor was perplexed; and when the Jews persisted, saying, 'We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God,' Pilate became alarmed. He 'entered into the palace again, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer.' Last of all, Pilate sent Him to Herod. For he had discovered that Jesus was from Galilee, over which Herod was tetrarch, and he was glad to shift his responsibility to the shoulders of another. And 'when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was of a long time desirous to see him, because he had heard concerning him; and he hoped to see some miracle done by him. And he questioned him in many words; but he answered him nothing.'

Three separate trials, before three distinct judges, and each time He 'opened not his mouth.' No doubt Philip would say that He

was fulfilling Scripture. But He was doing more than that. He was judging men. He was judging His judges. If He opened not His mouth when Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod asked Him their questions, it was because there was something in these men which made it impossible for Him to answer.

1. Take *Caiaphas* first. Caiaphas was a religious man. He was the head of the grandest religion that the world had ever known. On his forehead he bore the plate of gold with its legend, 'Holiness to the Lord.' On his breast he carried the ephod with the mysterious Urim and Thummim, by which to discover the will of God. Once a year he entered the Most Holy Place, passing within the veil, beyond which no foot but his could go, no eye but his penetrate. But in the religion of Caiaphas there was no reality. He was a formalist. He professed that which he did not practise; he practised that which he did not dare to profess. His religion was a cover for his covetousness; its glory was the goal of his selfish ambition.

One day news was brought to him that in a village a few miles from Jerusalem a man had been raised from the dead. Caiaphas called together the Council. He did not deny the fact of the man's resurrection from the dead. As a Sadducee he ought to have denied it; but the evidence was too strong. He called the Council together because he believed it. What was to be done? If Jesus began to raise people from the dead, at the very gates of the City, there would be no keeping the people from taking Him and making Him their King. Then the Romans would be down upon them, and Caiaphas would certainly lose the High-Priesthood which he had worked so hard to win and which it was the determination of his life to hold for many years to come. What was to be done?

The members of the Sanhedrin did not know what was to be done. Then Caiaphas rose. Where his own interests were concerned, this man always knew his mind. 'Ye know nothing at all,' he said, 'nor do ye take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.' 'It is expedient for *you*,' he said. Some early transcriber of the Gospels wrote 'it is expedient for us.' That is what Caiaphas meant, of course. But he was too adroit to say it. So 'from that day forth they took counsel that they might put him to death.'

¶ In the sense in which Caiaphas meant it, it was grotesquely untrue. As an act of political adroitness, the murder of Jesus was the most disastrous measure in Jewish history. The cup of Israel's bitterness has been filled to overflowing ever since the day they haled their divine missioner to Golgotha. And yet, in a sense of which Caiaphas never dreamed, his words were very gospel. God touched to finest issues even the tragedy of the Cross. Not only for the nation of the Hebrews, but for every people and kindred under heaven, was it not expedient that He died? [1]

Jesus knew that they had taken counsel to put Him to death. When the trial came He knew that He was condemned already. They might bring forward witnesses, and the witnesses might agree or disagree, it made no difference. Therefore, when Caiaphas rose and said, 'Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee? He held His peace, and answered nothing.'

2. Take *Herod* next. When Herod was told that Jesus was coming he was 'exceeding glad.' It was not the first time that he had heard of Him. Once, after the death of John the Baptist, some one brought him the intelligence that another prophet had appeared, and that the people were crowding to hear Him. Herod said an extraordinary thing. He said, It is not a new prophet; 'it is John whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead.' Herod had repented that rash speech many a day since then, and had wondered how he ever could have been betrayed into the folly of it. But when a man outrages his conscience, it frequently finds some way of making a fool of him. Some time after he had made inquiries about Jesus, not perhaps with any evil intention, more probably to satisfy a certain craving for rest of conscience that still remained with him. The Pharisees, however, advised Jesus to keep out of his way, and for once Jesus took their advice. Herod might think he had good motives, but what were they worth? 'Go and say to that fox,' said Jesus. It was a word as plain as John had ever uttered.

[1] Kennedy Williamson, *The Shining Traffic*, 89.

So Herod had never seen Jesus till now. When he saw Him he was exceeding glad. 'For,' says St Luke, 'he was of a long time desirous to see him, because he had heard concerning him; and he hoped to see some miracle done by him.' Was it mere curiosity? Perhaps it was. Perhaps it was not. There was one miracle which would have done for Herod all that his heart desired. For he had never forgotten John the Baptist and the joy with which he heard him. What if Jesus can work such a miracle as will bring back the thrill of those days again—*although Herod keeps his sin?* So he questioned Him in many words. But Jesus answered him nothing. For well spake Isaiah, 'Cease to do evil, learn to do well; come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.'

3. Take *Pilate* last. Towards Pilate the New Testament is strangely gentle. There is no word of anger or reproach; and it learned that from Christ, who looked at him sorrowfully as at a trapped creature, and would fain have helped him if He could. As they stand face to face, these two, one has the curious feeling that their rôles have been reversed; that quite obviously it is Christ who is the judge, and that the other knows it. The man is flustered and unhappy; his Roman justice sees through the thin plot, feels somehow instinctively that this is a trumped-up charge, knows in his bones the witnesses are lying. He paces to and fro; he goes in; he comes out; he takes Christ aside, and back into the court; he tries various expedients, now this, now that. And at first Christ answers with a kind of pity for him in His eyes. But by and by here, too, He will say nothing, but stands deliberately silent.

Jesus saw that Pilate knew his duty, and that he was shirking it, that he had finally made up his mind that he would not, and could not, do the one thing that there was to do with honour, and was trying to shuffle through upon some lower ground. And in that Christ would raise no finger to assist him. He had answered willingly so long as the man's mind was open and really hesitating. But now, He felt, he had closed it, had deliberately chosen wrongly; and Christ, in view of that, had nothing more to say. His silence, with His eyes upon the other, was a last appeal, a sorrowful reproach, a dreadful condemnation.

There was a prophet once who looked around him at a people, frivolous, giddy, sinful, and entirely easy in their minds; and he said that he heard God calling to him, from how far away, 'Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone.' No sound, no pleading, no reproach, no ruffled conscience! 'O Lord God, punish us, but be not silent toward us,' Luther prayed. And, indeed, pain is a kindly, hopeful thing, a certain proof of life, a clear assurance all is not yet over, and that there is still a chance. If our heart has no pain, that may betoken health, but are we certain that it does not mean that our souls are dead?

¶ John Donne, whom some, Quiller-Couch for one, rank as, perhaps, the noblest of all English preachers, has a tremendous passage, which some critics put among those in the very forefront of the finest English prose, appalling in its terrible, slow accumulating coldness of horror, till the heart is not far from screaming. 'It is a fearefull thing to fall into the hands of the living God: but to fall out of the hands of the living God is a horror beyond our expression, beyond our imagination'; and then, after musing upon His inexplicable patience toward us, how time after time, thwarted and denied, time after time He begins again as hopefully as ever some yet other way, he ends 'that this God at last, should let this soule goe away as a smoake, as a vapour, as a bubble; and that this soule cannot be a smoake, a vapour, nor a bubble, but must lie in darknesse, as long as the lord of light itselfe, and never sparke of that light reach to my soule—to be excluded eternally, eternally, eternally from the sight of God!' That is great English: yet the words are not well chosen. No one is excluded from God's presence; but one can shut oneself out. God cannot be false to His own nature; 'if we deny Him He will deny us': we cannot have both sin and Him; one or other it must be.[1]

If Christ has fallen silent toward us let us learn the lesson of that while there is still time. What was it He desired of us that we refused? We must get back to that, if we would know the old, happy, intimate relationship again. For till then He has no more to say. And all our friendliness toward

[1] A. J. Gossip, *From the Edge of the Crowd*, 118

Him leaves Him unimpressed. He will not waive the point. He will not pass it over. Until that is met, He stands obstinately silent.

The Lordship of Christ

Acts ix. 3.—'And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven.'

This is the story of one of those profoundly significant events in history on which the whole complexion of future thought and the course of future progress turn. St Paul is one of those great figures of the past about whom everything was on the large scale, both for himself and for the world. Intellectually, his views of truth have become a fundamental statement of the creed of twenty centuries; practically, he is the master empire-builder of the Kingdom of God in the world. But it was not by the natural development of his genius that he did this. Up to a certain moment in his career his powers were running to waste, spending themselves in the most futile ways. At that moment something occurred which revolutionized his whole life, an upheaveal of the very foundations of the man. Conversion sometimes means simply the memory of an emotion, which has left the man without a master, and without a task. But the greatness of this man's nature ensured the thoroughness of the change in him.

It is worth our while, in the first place, to inquire into the events which led up to that change; for it is evident that it was sudden only in its climax, as we may gather even from the words 'it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.'

1. *The Preparation.*—In these few sentences is concentrated a great part of the history of a soul. We see in a flash the inner turmoil which has been labouring to come to complete consciousness of itself. We see back to the days of youth and of passionate devotion to the religion of Israel. We see the young student in the lecture hall of Gamaliel with all his originality and force pledged to a punctilious study of the Law. And how living that Law must have been to him, alive with great memories and great hopes. But as the years passed his own soul became gradually disengaged, by its mere originality, from the soul of his people. It became aware of its vast dissatisfaction with itself, of a something wanting in the measure of its obedience. Yet there was no way of salvation but still more ardent personal devotion to the Law, still fiercer zeal in resisting every heretical revolt from its Divine orthodoxy. In such a mood, perhaps, he witnessed to the inexorable claims of the Law by taking part in the punishment of Stephen, and heard his dying words, and saw the glory on the face of the first martyr of Christ.

May we not believe that the trouble of his soul was deepened by the haunting memory of that glory? Here, outside the Law, defying the strictness of its claims, were a confidence, a joy, a victorious hope, which the most scrupulous obedience to it had never been able to yield him. Might it not be after all that this new way of which men spoke was the true salvation, that Jesus was the risen and victorious Messiah for whom Israel longed? Yet no. It was impossible that an unlearned Galilean who placed himself above the Law—'Ye have heard what Moses said, but I say unto you'—could be the true Messiah. Sometimes he was shaken in mind. Was not the character of Jesus, and of His followers, inexplicably beautiful? Had they not some secret of gladness and of serenity hidden from the ancient world? Though temporarily shaken, in order to conceal from himself the doubts which at times frequented his mind, he became all the more determined in his endeavour to stamp out the heresy.

2. *The Crisis.*—The zealot of the Law, all the more a zealot because it could no longer satisfy him, was on his way to persecute the truth for which his soul was longing. Do not all men become more violent in their assertion of their beliefs when they seem to find them being shaken? The hour came when that proud spirit had to be forced to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ. For one so violent in opposition, so determined in conflict, no easy measures would suffice and we find him overtaken by an experience which he cannot understand. He is beaten down; on the Damascus Road he sees someone but does not know who it is with whom he holds converse.

The Authorized Version wrongly reads, 'Who art thou, Lord?' as though Saul at once knew that the person who met him on the Damascus Road was Jesus, but this stage has not yet been reached. Unknown, overmastering, awe-inspiring, this visitant appears. 'Who art thou, Sir?' and the answer comes, 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.' Saul had been forced to recognize in the Jesus whom he persecuted a Lord whom he must obey.

¶ On December 16, 1904, a day stamped upon his memory for ever after, Sundar took his Bible, soaked it in kerosene oil, and threw it into the fire. His father saw what he was doing. 'Why do you do such a stupid thing?' he asked. 'Because this religion of the West is false; we must destroy it,' was the reply. For three days after, Sundar was tormented with doubts and unrest. What was Truth? Was there a God at all? Jesus Christ was, of course, only a man, and had died nearly nineteen hundred years ago.

The boy made up his mind to settle his doubts once and for ever. If there was no God, then he would end his life. He went to his father and said, 'I am going to say good-bye to you. You will find me dead to-morrow morning.' 'Why do you want to kill yourself?' asked the Sirdar. 'Because,' answered Sundar, 'the Hindu religion cannot satisfy my soul, nor yet can wealth, comfort, or possessions. Your money can satisfy my bodily needs, but not the needs of my soul. I have had enough of this miserable, incomplete life. I am going to end it.'

He made his plans carefully. At the bottom of their garden ran the railway line, and every morning at five o'clock an express thundered by. He would throw himself under that train if he obtained no answer to his prayer for satisfaction and peace. He woke up at three o'clock on the morning of December 18, got out of bed, and had a cold bath. Then he began to pray. 'If there is a God, let Him show me the way of salvation, and I will serve Him all my life; otherwise I shall kill myself.' Thus he prayed for an hour and a half. There was only half an hour left before the train was due to pass. 'If God exists, let Him show me the way,' said Sundar. Then suddenly the room was filled with radiant, glorious light. For He Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life had come Himself to claim the love and service of His young servant.

Sundar looked up in amazement. What was this light? Was the house on fire? Or could it be, in some way, a message to him from God, in answer to his prayers? Then in the light he saw a Figure, splendid beyond earthly dreams, glowing with radiance, and smiling at him in perfect, heavenly love. Who was He? The Buddha? Krishna? Or some other holy one who had heard his prayers? Yet, what were those wound-marks in His hands? Then the Man spoke in a voice of melodious sweetness, saying in Hindustani, 'How long will you persecute Me? I died for you. I am the Saviour of the world.'

Sundar Singh fell down at the feet of his Master, knowing Him at last. 'Jesus Christ is not dead, but living, and it must be He Himself,' he thought. Peace had come to him from where he had least looked for it, and it brought with it such a feeling of happiness as he had never dreamed man could reach.[1]

¶ The Damascus Road is not only Eastern. John Bunyan tells us of it in deathless language: 'But upon a day the good Providence of God called me to Bedford to work at my calling, and in one of the streets of that town I came where there were three or four women sitting at a door in the sun, talking about the things of God.' We all know that the women sitting at a door in the sun gave to Bunyan his 'place in the sun.' The revelation came to him, too, as he journeyed, and suddenly.[2]

Oh, once in centuries olden, before Damascus Gate,
Journeyed one with holden eyes and a dreary heart of hate;
When a glory shone round about him, and in one wondrous hour
He had passed from death to life. Then knowledge and grace and power
And a new word filled his lips; and joy and courage and love
Were born henceforth in his heart, with the vision that fell from above.
And still, when the days are bitter, and life is clogged with care,
And the heart is salt with unshed tears and tender with despair,
An angel stirs the stagnant soul, and lo! there is healing there.

[1] E. Sanders and Ethelred Judah, *Sundar Singh*, 20.
[2] W. B. Brash, *The Pilgrim's Way*, 22.

Once more my song is loosened, and the life and labour sweet;
Once more in the tangled weft the pattern shines complete;
And I know that the self-same grace on my soul has been outpoured.
My spirit, by Damascus Gate, has heard the voice of her Lord.

3. *The Result.*—For three days and three nights, blinded and living in a strange home, Paul neither eats nor drinks. This may possibly have been because his heart was filled with such a strange joy that he was lifted above such mundane considerations. Yet this is not the probable reason; in all likelihood they were the most trying days of his whole life. Truth had come to him; no longer could he go on persecuting the Christians. His life had been wrong but what was he to do about it? There were various choices. He might have gone back quietly to Jerusalem, explained that for personal reasons he desired to surrender his commission, and if he heard someone speak disparagingly of the Christians he might have uttered a word of caution, but no more. This was the easy way and many had chosen it. 'Nevertheless, among the chief rulers also,' we read, 'many believed on him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him.'

On the other hand, there was the way which conscience dictated. If Jesus were Lord the world must know of it, and he must play his part in spite of persecution. This was the nobler way, and after these days of struggle and contest we find him ready to choose it. He arose and was baptized, and from that hour he lived his life in the assured presence of the Lord of all life.

To profess Christ publicly is a great help in the Christian life. The truths which we may have acknowledged implicitly we now acknowledge openly, and, because we are conscious that we are holding back nothing that our Lord demands, we find a new joy and a new hope. The act of confirmation, of joining the membership of the Church, when reverently entered upon, provides the opportunity of confession, although there are those in all our churches who have joined the full membership without serious thought. Yet there are many loyal hearts and true who, when they took this momentous step, took it with a full sense of the implications involved. Christ was raising His armies to follow Him to the conquest of the world and they were eager to join the ranks and to bear if need be the reproach of discipleship. They had discovered a Leader whom they rejoiced to serve.

I have a captain, and the heart
Of every private man
Has drunk in valour from his eyes,
Since first the war began.
He is most merciful in fight
And of his scars a single sight
The embers of our failing might
Into a flame can fan.

Do some of us feel that while we acknowledge our Lord in a general way, there is not in our lives any of the true over-mastering joy which is sometimes associated with discipleship? For those who are not yet members, let them, with full understanding of what it means, come forward, nailing their colours to the mast. For others, let there be some definite service undertaken, some new allegiance declared, some new pathway explored, and in this new service there will come the joy of those who are 'not disobedient to the heavenly vision.'

Christ and our Daily Calling

Acts ix. 6.—'And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?'

One of the outstanding things in the conversion of Paul is the completeness of his surrender to Jesus. His whole opposition to Christ collapsed like a great fortress whose foundations have been undermined. With many people conversion is a long and gradual process. When Christ comes upon the soul, said John Owen, 'He hath no quiet landing-place.' He finds a foothold in one part of the nature, but it often takes years before He has consolidated His victory and won control of every part of the citadel. Many men are Christian in their sentiments but they are not Christian in their thinking; they are Christian in their home but not in their business; in their private life but not in their social relationships; and often they do not realize it. Paul could do nothing by halves, even when he was trying to ex-

terminate Christianity; and the very strength of his nature, organized and disciplined against Christ, went immediately over, with all its developed power, to Christ's control. It was a case of perfect abandonment. And he fell on his face, trembling and astonished, and said, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?'

¶ Henry Drummond did not speak to men so much about saving their souls, as if the soul were a thing apart, but about saving their *life*—every part of that life redeemed from the power of evil, every part of it given up to Jesus Christ. In his interleaved Testament, he gives this 'Receipt for Misery—Be a half-hearted Christian.'[1]

These words, on the surface, suggest a man whose life has been brought to wreck and ruin around him, and who is at his wits' end—the condition, as the Psalmist tells us, in which a man is ready to make a beginning with God, and God is able to take charge of his life. But there was more in the cry than sheer despair, for Paul was not in the habit of using words rashly. There were two things in it to which we ought to give our minds.

1. There was the *instinct for action*, and the acknowledgment that religion demands activity. 'What wilt thou have me to *do*?' Like everything else, Christianity must find expression in action, for genuine life produces activity. Every living thought blazes a path for itself in words or deeds. Every deep emotion must find a channel. There is very little Christianity about a man if it is not making him do something. There is very little fire in the locomotive if it is not transforming its energy into motion. When God sought to reveal His highest thought, He put it into a *life*. Real religion is not a theology to be argued about, it is a life to be lived. The trouble with many people is that they use worship as a lightning conductor for religious emotion to pass harmlessly away, instead of finding some contact with life's tasks or duties in which that emotion can become vital and dynamic.

We live by Faith; but Faith is not the slave
Of text and legend. Reason's voice and God's,
Nature's and Duty's, never are at odds.
What asks our Father of His children, save
Justice and mercy and humility,
A reasonable service of good deeds,
Pure living, tenderness to human needs,
Reverence and trust, and prayer for light to see
The Master's footprints in our daily ways?
No knotted scourge, nor sacrificial knife,
But the calm beauty of an ordered life,
Whose very breathing is unworded praise!—
A life that stands as all true lives have stood,
Firm-rooted in the faith that God is Good.[1]

2. Further, religious activity is *the activity of the whole life directed by Jesus*. The whole man must be in it—the praying man, the loving man, and the working man. When Paul said, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' he put his whole life at the disposal of Jesus. He gave into the hands of Christ the steering-wheel and the engine control and stood by to obey orders. He made Christ Master of the ship. He hailed Christ Lord of his whole personality. His thinking was to be guided by Christ, for in Christ he recognized the truth. His ambition was to be directed by Christ, for in Christ he had found life's glorious objective. He would take up whatever work Christ bade him do. He was ready to scrap all the old life, work and friendships, career and habits, in order that Christ might reconstruct his life from its foundations. Everything was flung into the melting-pot, to be run into the moulds and reshaped by Christ. Other men since his day have done the same thing, and made a completely fresh beginning. Francis of Assisi left behind him the whole furniture of a rich man's life and went out to found a new order of Christian service. Brother Lawrence, after being a footman and a soldier, put his life at the disposal of Christ and found his sphere of labour in the kitchen of a Carmelite Monastery. However impossible such revolutionary changes of calling may seem to us in our own situation, they light up the meaning of Christianity, which is a life set at the disposal of Christ.

This brings before us the whole question of the call of Christ and our daily calling. The truth faces us at once, from this cry of Paul, that a man's daily calling must be part of the expression of his Christian life. There, as elsewhere, Christ must direct and control. To shut the office door or the factory gate upon

[1] J. Flew, *Saints of Yesterday*, 15.

[1] Whittier.

Christ is to deny the mastership of Jesus in the most essential part of our life. For a Christian man the phrase that 'business is business,' in the meaning some give to it, is a denial of Christ's right to rule. 'I mean to live,' said a man once, 'and to have no gaps of death in the middle of my life.'

¶ Chalmers' saintliness was not that of an anchorite brooding in religious solitude. Here was a man, bustling, striving, organizing, speaking and preaching with the dust and fire of the world on his clothes, but carrying his shrine with him everywhere.[1]

We cannot close our eyes to the fact that this opens up a good many difficulties. For one thing, if our work is to be Christian, we must be sure we are doing the thing Christ wants us to do. We must be sure we have a task which can express a Christian personality. Can a Christian man possibly find a legitimate calling in providing degrading entertainments, or unworthy literature, or in making a profit out of trades which are poisonous to the moral and physical well-being of those who are engaged in them? The problem for a man in such a situation is one which he will have to face for himself by the light of his own conscience. It may be his duty to go out of a calling or business which offers a perpetual rebuke to conscience, if he is unable to change the conditions.

¶ Dr T. R. Glover tells the story of a sculptor in the early days of the Church who was converted to Christ. As the light broke gradually into his life, it came home to him that he could no longer make images of the gods for heathen temples. He could not put a Christian soul into a heathen image. Very reluctantly, but with conviction, he gave up that handicraft with all its appeal to the artistic sense, and took to a mason's calling, shaping stones, squaring and cutting—a prosaic occupation, but one at least which he felt was not inconsistent with his faith, and where he could find a useful way of serving his fellows. But the artist in his soul demanded expression in his work, and he conceived the idea of making a statue of the Good Shepherd with the lost lamb upon His shoulders. People criticized the truth of the statue. The Good Shepherd of the tenth of John has no lamb upon His shoulders; but the answer was that this was his experience of what Christ had done for him. He had been found by the Shepherd, lost and wandering, and the truth of Christ in his own soul demanded outlet in his craft.[1]

[1] Lord Rosebery, *Dr Chalmers*, 12.

The point is that the truth of Christ in our souls must find outlet in our calling. Every part of life must give expression to the mind which has been touched by the redeeming power of Jesus. If we are His, our work must show it. It may be that the right thing for us is not to leave our post but to stay there and work steadily for changing the conditions, bringing a new conscience into a degrading business, to sweep it clean of all that is unworthy of truth and love. The business of a Christian society is to create a conscience about bad conditions and unworthy occupations.

The world is in sore need of men and women in definite Christian service at home and abroad, but the world is dying for men and women who will find in their work a sacred call and see in it a means of expressing their loyalty to Christ. What we need to-day, as some one says, is 'the spiritual mind in the man of the world.' Our choice of a profession must not be governed by the money we can earn or the profit we can win. The money pull in industry is the root of half our troubles. When the quality of work is confused with the quantity of wages and our service is determined by our rewards, the devil gets into the business and our life goes off the rails.

But what of those who have no choice, or have made their choice before they became alive to Christ, and now find all other doors are shut? It may be we are in a situation where, in the light of some new experience, we should like to change our calling. Many have already drifted into their niche by compulsions not of their own making. What are we to say to them? The word for them is surely this—that the compulsions of life must be accepted as the call of God. If we are in a place from which there is no escaping, that place is for us the place of our calling. It is in the meantime the place where God can help us to serve Him. The great thing is to take our work and our gifts and put them at His disposal *there*.

Are there no changes we can make in the quality of our work, if not in the form of it?

[1] J. Reid, *The Victory of God*, 190.

Would it not make a difference to the whole standard of life's comfort and the prosperity of our fellows if we took Christ into the workshop with us and made our toil a fellowship with Him?

Our work, whatever it be, is only a channel. The task of a Christian man is the revelation of Jesus. Paul had to leave his early calling and scour the face of Europe with his gospel to do it. He revealed Christ with his mind, his tongue, his method, his friendship. He revealed Him in the helping hand he held out to others, in the courage and patience of his great soul liberated by faith amid a tangle of difficulties in victorious service. There is no part of our life in which the light of Christian character may not break through some chink or cranny. So far as we are Christian we are translating Christ to the world in everything we do, as Christ revealed something of Himself in every situation. And a man can translate Christ to his fellows in the language of a finished piece of work, in its limited degree, as clearly as he can in a book or a poem or a sermon.

¶ 'In making shoes, and because he makes them, a man can gain heaven,' says Unamuno, 'provided that the shoemaker strives to be perfect as a shoemaker, as our Father in heaven is perfect.'

The Vision and the City

Acts ix. 6.—'Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.'

THE city was Damascus. Paul was just within sight of its shining walls. It was the city for which he had set out three days ago, intending to seize the disciples of Jesus wherever he could find them. We shall never know what thoughts had been intruding, what whisperings of conscience had been audible, but we do know how Paul had crushed them down in his magnificent if mistaken sense of duty. Then in the open road Christ met with him, and in a moment everything was changed. He was thrown down, and he was lifted up. He was blinded, and he was made to see. Christ had been loving him although he never knew it; and now the hour had struck, and the past vanished, and Paul was recreated in his Lord.

In that hour would not Paul feel a strong reluctance to continue his journey to Damascus? There any man whom he met might be a Christian, and he had been bent on slaughtering the Christians. Let him be hid in some solitary place, far from the noise and traffic of the streets. Let him be alone, in a vast solitude, to brood over this great thing that had befallen him. It was then, in such a mood as that, that there came to Paul the command of Jesus Christ: 'Arise, and go into the city.' Still go into the city where you meant to go. Your route shall not be altered. Your new life must walk over the same road where the old life was walking. Take up your journey again. Only remember that things are different now, for everywhere you go I am with you.

1. There comes to us all at times the longing for a change of circumstance. Probably this desire is most common when we, too, have had our hour of vision. There are long periods when we are content. We do not quarrel with our day's monotony. We are satisfied with our nutshell, unlike Hamlet, just because we have no dreams. But then some day there comes to us the vision—the light that never was on sea or land—and there falls on us the longing to escape. It may be when the glow of youth is on us, or when we have felt the beauty of the world; or love may have touched us with its mystic finger, or death may have opened the windows of the infinite. In hours such as these it is not easy to go quietly forward. It is not easy to touch the common chords. We want to get away to a new sphere, out of the drudgery and dull routine. And it is then that, to our restless hearts, comes *God*, with accent unmistakable, and says, 'Arise, and go into the city.' He will not give to us a new environment. Vision is not given for new environment. Vision is given that we may take its glory and carry it into the twilight of the old. Vision is given that everything we do, and every relationship in which we stand, may have some melody that was awanting once, before our eyes were opened by the way.

The same thing is particularly true of the vision of God in Jesus Christ. Of course we know that Christ may come to us and call us to some special service. There are those who have received that call and have not disobeyed. But remember that for one case like that there

are a thousand cases not like that. Christ does not call to any distant field; He says, 'Arise, and go into the city.' Does that not seem an anti-climax—to see Christ; and then resume the road? But when we study God's methods we find that He loves an anti-climax. He takes the sun and makes the daisy beautiful. He takes the mightiest forces of millenniums, and uses them to shape the tiny crystal. And so He takes the vision of the Christ, the love and power of the great Redeemer, and says, Employ it for your daily work, and make the common beautiful thereby. It may be the mark of genius to do unusual things. The Christian rarely does unusual things, but he does usual things in an unusual way. He finds a meaning in what before was meaningless; detects a beauty in what before was ugly; sees in the commonest tasks that may be set him an avenue to the feet of Jesus Christ. If you have seen Him, as the Apostle did, in something of His love and of His power, then comes the calling to the road of yesterday. 'Arise, and go into the city.' It is not a paradise by any means. There is no romance in it and it is grimy. But either there or nowhere you can make fruitfully and beautifully evident that you have had your vision by the way.

¶ Sir Walter Scott says that the most beautiful scenery in Scotland is where the Highlands and the Lowlands meet. Not in the Highlands, nor yet in the Lowlands, but at the meeting of the two. And it is as true in the spiritual kingdom, when the beaten track becomes the highway of God, and the heavenly places in Christ Jesus are connected with the common duties and everyday business of life.[1]

2. There is another thought, that we may take from the last words of the text, 'Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.' Paul was to learn God's will not in the solitude of lonely places but in the stir and movement of the city. Would not that be a great surprise to him? He had not been wont to associate city life with the whispering of the voice of heaven. He had been born in Tarsus, and educated there, and Tarsus was a typically Roman city. It was not the voice of God that was heard there, it was the voice of the devil that was audible. Paul knew the sin that flaunted in her streets, and how meanly and bestially the poor were living, and how the shame and badness of it all were crying out to heaven for punishment. We talk about the perils of the city, and God knows they are terrible enough. But our city life is lofty compared with that of the cities Paul had known. And yet that day, when Jesus met with him, what was the first command that he received? 'Arise, and go into the *city*, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.' Moses had learned the will of God for him in the great silence at the back of Horeb. Elijah, amid the mountain solitudes, had heard the calling of the voice of heaven. But now the Christ had come, moving amid the homes and haunts of men, and everything was to be different. Instead of the solitude we have the city. Instead of the lone hill the busy street. Not now where the cool wind is blowing is a man to learn his duty and his mission. He is to learn it where lives are inter-tangled, for weal and woe, in business and in battle; where men and women are, where love and hatred are, where there is social claim and social duty.

Now there are times when some such feeling as this possesses us. We think it would be easier to be better men if only we could steal away. If only we could leave this city life, and get into the gladness of the country, and hear the river with its tireless music, and walk amid the peace of the green hills; if only we could lay our burden down, and be relieved of the pressure for a little, we think we should have quicker ears for God then, and that it would be easier to be good. Well, our Lord is no taskmaster. If we need rest, then He will give us rest. He knows, and, knowing, sympathizes with, the weariness and the pressure of the city. But for all that, this stands and stands for ever, that Christ is the Christ of men and not of deserts, and that where men are, in all their needs and sorrows, is the appointed place to learn His will. We do not learn God's will by flight.

Not in the tombs we pine to dwell,
Not in the dark monastic cell,
By vows and grates confined;
Freely to all ourselves we give,
Constrained by Jesu's love to live
The servants of mankind.[1]

[1] L. A. Banks.

[1] Charles Wesley.

The will of God is social, not selfish; it is *Our* Father we are taught to pray. It is struck out for us amid the clash of lives. It is revealed in the light of our relationships. It is discovered by every task we do, and by every burden that we bravely bear. It is not when our powers are dormant that we learn God's will; it is when our powers are intensely active. It is not when we are dead to human need; it is when the cry of it rings upon our ear. It is not when the hand is withdrawn from other hands, but when it is clasped in the strong grip of comradeship, that, step by step and day by day, we come to see what God would have us do. 'Arise, and go into the city, and there thou shalt be told what thou must do.'

I said, 'Let me walk in the field';
He said, 'Nay, walk in the town.'
I said, 'There are no flowers there;'
He said, 'No flowers, but a crown.'

I said, 'But the skies are black,
There is nothing but noise and din.'
And He wept as He sent me back,
'There is more,' He said; 'there is sin.'

I said, 'But the air is thick,
And fogs are veiling the sun.'
He answered, 'Yet souls are sick,
And souls in the dark undone.'

I said, 'I shall miss the light,
And friends will miss me, they say.'
He answered me, 'Choose to-night,
If I am to miss you, or they.'

I pleaded for time to be given;
He said, 'Is it hard to decide?
It will not seem hard in heaven
To have followed the steps of your Guide.'

I cast one look at the field,
Then set my face to the town.
He said, 'My child, do you yield?
Will you leave the flowers for the crown?'

Then into His hand went mine,
And into my heart came He,
And I walked in a light divine,
The path I feared to see.[1]

[1] George Macdonald.

The Religious Faculty

Acts ix. 7.—'And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.'
Acts xxii. 9.—'And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.'

SOMETHING startling happened on the road to Damascus. It was seen and heard by Saul and his companions; all saw a light and heard a sound; but to Saul of Tarsus it was an entirely different experience from that of his fellow travellers. They saw the light; he saw the Figure of Jesus. They heard a confused noise; he heard a voice speaking personally to him. The noise they heard and the light they saw appear to have made no religious impression on Saul's escort. In spite of the transformation in their leader they do not seem to have become Christians; but Saul of Tarsus underwent a change that completely altered his career, and has left an indelible impress upon the history of mankind. The same light and the same noise—what different results!

When Paul looked back on his experience, he did not emphasize its suddenness. He writes that 'it was the good pleasure of God who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace.' This seemed

a day to which all days
Were footsteps in God's secret ways.

His mind had already been appealed to by something in the message of this Jesus, for he was kicking against the goad in rejecting Him. So Paul's case is not really different from that of others. His conscience had already been laid hold of, and the assurance that Jesus was alive in power simply completed the conversion of his reason.

1. This sheds light on *the question of religious belief and unbelief.* Our world is the same for everybody, with the same day and night, work and play, sickness and health, joy and sorrow, life and death. The differences between the lots of individuals are insignificant as compared with the sameness of that which is everybody's. But there are two very different interpretations of it. To one set of people the world is just the world; they enjoy what is pleasant and grumble at what is otherwise, use according to their capacity the stock of wisdom they inherit from the experiences of their predecessors, and go

through life without any sense of the existence of an Invisible Companion. To others the world is not just the world, but the world and its invisible but most real Lord, from whom they accept its arrangements, to whom they ascribe the inspiration of the wisest and best thoughts they find in their own or other men's minds, and in whose personal friendship they pass through life and into death with a vivid anticipation of something beyond. How is it that the same set of facts conveys such different impressions?

¶ You may recall the scene in the tavern in *Silas Marner* where the village worthies discuss the credibility of ghosts.

'"There's folks, i' my opinion," says the landlord, "they can't see ghos'es, not if they stood as plain as a pike-staff before 'em. And there's reason i' that. For there's my wife, now, can't smell, not if she'd the strongest o' cheese under her nose. I never see'd a ghost myself; but then I says to myself, 'Very like I haven't got the smell for 'em.'" . . .

'"Tut, tut," answers the farrier, "what's the smell got to do with it? . . . If ghos'es want me to believe in 'em, let 'em leave off skulking i' the dark and i' lone places—let 'em come where there's company and candles."'

There are similar attitudes towards God. Some people with a taste for Him stoutly declare His reality; while others insist that, if God wants them to believe in Him, He ought to disclose Himself so plainly that there could be no mistaking Him. They resent this uncertainty. 'Facts are facts,' they remind us. 'There is no difference of opinion about the warmth of sunlight or the wetness of rain. The sun shines on the evil and the good, and the rain falls on just and unjust. Why should not God, if He exists, make Himself equally indisputable? If Jesus rose from the dead and is alive with power, why should not all see His form and hear His voice?'

The fact that the cause of Jesus could not be beaten, that Jesus Himself could not be killed and banished from God's earth, ought to have been clear to every one; but it was only the faith of the disciples and the mastered conscience of Saul of Tarsus that made the discovery. The reality of God should have been obvious to everybody; but, as a matter of history, there have always been believers and sceptics.

¶ There was a close friendship between Thomas Huxley and Professor Haughton, although they stood far apart in religious conviction. Haughton, before his death, told of a conversation with Huxley in which the latter said to him: 'There are those who profess to believe what I consider false; but I do not regard their opinions, because I doubt the sincerity of some and the intellectual capacity of others; but I respect you, and I know how sincerely you believe what you hold so strongly, and should like very much to know how it is that you believe what I can't believe.' 'May I speak frankly?' asked Haughton. 'Certainly.' 'Then,' he said, 'I don't know how it is, except that you are colour-blind.' Huxley was much struck. 'Well, it may be so. Of course, if I were colour-blind, I should not know it myself.'

¶ Thomas Hardy pictures the case of the man who lacks the religious sense, who is 'colour blind' to the beauties of religion and deaf to the voices of the spirit. His verses are entitled *The Impercipient*. He represents himself as having been present at a cathedral service, hearing the music and observing the hushed and reverent attitude of the worshippers. He himself, however, has had no part in the service. The music and the ritual, the praise and the prayers, have all meant nothing to him. He found no answering response in his nature to what others found to be a quickening influence. So turning away from the cathedral and its impressive service he gave voice to his disappointment,

That with this bright believing band
I have no claim to be,
That faiths by which my comrades stand
Seem fantasies to me,
And mirage-mists their Shining Land,
Is a strange destiny.

Although he does not see, he is sensible of the fact that others see. He is not indifferent; he is dissatisfied. He is like one who is seeking rest and finds none.

Since heart of mine knows not that ease
Which they know; since it be
That He who breathes All's Well to these
Breathes no All's-Well to me,
My lack might move their sympathies
And Christian charity!

I am like a gazer who should mark
An inland company
Standing upfingered, with, 'Hark! hark!
The glorious distant sea!'
And feel, 'Alas, 'tis but yon dark
And wind-swept pine to me!'

Yet I would bear my shortcomings
With meet tranquillity,
But for the charge that blessed things
I'd liefer not have be.
O, doth a bird deprived of wings
Go earth-bound wilfully!

. . . . . .

Enough. As yet disquiet clings
About us. Rest shall we.[1]

2. If faith is a peculiar faculty which some possess and others lack, then a man either has or hasn't it, and if he hasn't it he must content himself with seeing a blurring light where others have a vision of God in Christ, and with hearing a confused noise in what to others is the personal call of God. But *our religious sense*, like our taste in literature, or our conscience, *is a developable instinct*. Goethe told Eckermann, 'I show you only the best works, and when you are grounded in these you will have a standard for the rest.' A correct conscience is not something that is born in us. A small boy is as likely to arrive in the world with a silk hat on his head as with a proper sense of obligation. Father and mother, teachers and pastor, must set themselves to educate him in responsibility, and produce in him a conscience that shall function properly under all life's complex circumstances. Religious faith—the appreciation of God, the sense of His presence, the eye for His goodness and the ear for His summons to duty—can be cultivated.

Edmund Burke, in his treatise on 'The Sublime and Beautiful,' remarks that 'it is known that the taste is improved exactly as we improve our judgment by extending our knowledge, by a steady attention to our object, and by frequent exercise.'

'By extending our knowledge.' No man can appreciate poetry unless he is fairly well read in the poets. No man can hope for a rich experience of God unless he is conversant with those great souls who in the past have walked closely with Him. To extend our knowledge of the God of the psalmists, the historians, the wise men of Israel, of God seen through Jesus by the evangelists and letter writers of the New Testament, is to go a long way towards awakening and strengthening in ourselves that instinct which sees Him who is invisible. And, as Rosalind says, 'The sight of lovers feedeth those in love'; so familiarity with believers feedeth those in faith.

¶ A well-known choir conductor was invited by a certain choirmaster to come and criticize the performance of his singers. In particular he confessed that he himself was conscious of something lacking in their rendering of Tchaikovsky's 'Our Father.' 'Why,' said the other, 'the explanation is sticking out of your pocket.' The choirmaster, in astonishment at the remark, drew a copy of a weekly 'rag' from its place of concealment. 'No one who reads trash like that can expect to teach his choir to render Tchaikovsky's "Our Father,"' said his candid friend.[1]

'By a steady attention to our object.' Does the Christian God appeal to us as desirable? If we really believed in Him it would certainly make vast differences in our modes of life, in our attitude towards all sorts of questions, in the risks we were prepared to take, in the things we would absolutely refuse to do. Do we honestly want to believe in Him, provided we sincerely can? No one will give 'a steady attention' to the search for God unless he is desperately eager to be sure of Him; and it has been the experience of many centuries that nobody ever sought God with his whole heart and failed to find Him. It requires a venture. One must be prepared to risk trying love as the ultimate wisdom and the final force in the universe, precisely as Jesus took the supreme risk of Calvary. And without this 'steady attention to our object' there is no reason for imagining that God will become palpably evident to us.

'And by frequent exercise.' Paul told King Agrippa that he had not been disobedient unto his heavenly vision. If he had, it is likely that some day he would have come to the conclusion that his companions, and not he, were right. What convinced Paul was the life into which his vision led him. People

[1] H. T. Kerr, *The Gospel in Modern Poetry*, 159.

[1] Hubert L. Simpson, *Put Forth by the Moon*, 183.

might tell him that he had had a sunstroke; but he knew that, sunstroke or anything else, life had assumed a new meaning and fascination for him; that depths of joy and peace and strength and hope had been opened up; that he had passed into a friendship he could adequately describe only by saying that he knew the God and Father of Jesus Christ. As he obeyed the impulses that came upon him with mastering force in that hour of his prostration life disclosed its unsearchable riches for him. However the light and the noise of the Damascus road might be explained physically, they had an indubitable moral significance. Christ had been formed in him, and it was no longer Saul of Tarsus that lived, but a new man in Christ Jesus. 'By frequent exercise,' by unremitting toil for the Kingdom, his faith flourished and grew in vigour. Years after the startling day on the Damascus road, when life's experience had turned in its accumulated evidence, he wrote confidently, 'I know whom I have believed.'

Light obeyed increaseth light:
Light rejected bringeth night.

The varied experiences of life may be Divinely significant or baldly meaningless. They may be clear and distinct utterances of God to us, guiding, correcting, inspiring; or they may be the usual rumble of the world's life, saying nothing. The seeing eye and the hearing ear are for us to develop. It is a sombre reflection that, after these centuries of His vital activity in the world, Jesus is still dead to so many; that the living God does not exist for everybody. It lies within our power to let Christ be a living factor in our careers, to give God the chance to be really God to us. The same light and the same sound can be so differently understood.

¶ Coleridge and Shelley visited Chamounix about the same time. As a result the one wrote his noble hymn in the Vale of Chamounix in which Nature seemed to take one voice, and echo and re-echo to the name of God. The other wrote in the visitors' book 'Percy Bysshe Shelley. Atheist.' [1]

Where one heard thunder, and one saw flame,
I only know He named my name.

[1] J. Burns.

The Blindness of Vision

Acts ix. 8.—'When his eyes were opened, he saw nothing' (R.V.).

Blinded by the flash of light from heaven, the Apostle was flung prostrate on the ground. It was then that the Saviour said to him, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' For a little space his eyes were shut, as eyes instinctively shut in self-defence. Then in a moment or two the Apostle rose, and looked around him, and scanned the heavens above him, and 'when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing.'

That is a very remarkable conclusion; we are tempted to say it is absurd. It is so different from what we might have expected as a consequence of the opening of the eyes. There was a young man once, in Old Testament times, who was sorely frightened by an Assyrian army. And the prophet, in pity for him, prayed to God, 'Lord, open the young man's eyes that he may see.' And when the eyes of that young man were opened he saw a sight to make any coward brave, for the mountain was full of the chariots of the Lord. That is the fitting consequence of vision. It reveals to us what we never saw before. It shows us in common hearts unlooked-for things, and in common scenes an undiscovered glory. But here, on the road to Damascus, and at midday, it is the very opposite which meets us; when his eyes were opened he saw nothing. The question is, in our own life's experience is there anything analogous to that? Is there any opening of the eyes which leaves us with a vision forfeited?

1. To begin with, let us think of the little frets of life, the pinpricks and unkindnesses which most people experience as they journey. There are folk who brood upon such things as these until they practically see nothing else.

¶ In *Mosses from an Old Manse* Nathaniel Hawthorne writes: 'There are so many unsubstantial sorrows which the necessity of our mortal stage begets on idleness, that an observer, casting aside sentiment, is sometimes led to question whether there may be any real woe except absolute physical suffering and the loss of closest friends.' This is, of course, an extreme statement of the case. Besides physical suffering and bereavement

there are many other forms of affliction real and terrible enough. Yet it must be allowed that our sorrows are often largely unsubstantial and our bitter complaints well-nigh groundless. We condole with ourselves about troubles which are simply passing inconveniences; we magnify pinpricks into crucifixions.[1]

But when through the mercy of God our eyes are opened, of all these little pinpricks we see nothing. Our eyes have been opened to what real suffering is. Our eyes have been opened to that larger life which is always given us in Christ. And the beautiful thing about that life is this, that worries which were overwhelming yesterday have somehow vanished so that we cannot see them in the love commended on the Cross. Every rock and ridge is clear and glistening in the Highland burn when it is low. But when the summer rain falls or the winter snow, then they become invisible. And so it is in many a man's life when a new tide of being has possessed him; things that were sharp and hard, and hurt him yesterday, have somehow become invisible to-day.

2. Does not the same thing often happen also with that opening of the eyes which the years bring? We experience it in many different ways. Here, for instance, is a child who thinks the world of a certain picture. It hangs on the wall of the nursery at home, and is perfectly beautiful to him. It is only a rough and inartistic daub, but to the child it is a joy for ever. Then the years pass, and the little brain is educated, and these two little eyes are taught to see—taught to distinguish what is really beautiful from what is only a travesty of beauty; and then the child comes back to that old oleograph which long ago delighted him, and now that his eyes are opened *he sees nothing*. We can mark our progress by our growing vision. We can also mark it by our growing blindness. Not only do we see more as the years pass; if we are spending them rightly, we see less—less in certain books we thought the world of, and in certain societies we held delightful, and in certain characters we thought ideal.

3. Then our text applies to many of those messages with which the world is ringing. There are faiths and philosophies which vanish when you see. When the sun is shining on you and the world is beautiful, you go, for instance, to hear a certain preacher. You have never been plunged into the depths yet, and have never felt your utter need of Christ. And the man is artistic, or he is intellectual, or he has the fire and passion of the orator, and you feel as if you would never want another message. It may be that if the sun were always shining that message would suffice you. But this is a strange, grim world, with lightning-flashes, and storms that cry havoc, and waves that cruelly beat. And when these days come, and you feel your need of Christ, and of an arm to lean on and a hand to save you, no charm of speech—no intellect nor artistry—can reach and satisfy the soul. You want a love that goes unto the uttermost. You want a heart on which to lean securely though the whole universe should fall in ruin. And whenever through trial and suffering and sorrow your eyes have been opened to see that, then in the fine artistic preaching *you see nothing*.

> The strong, the easy, and the glad
> Hang blandly listening on Thy word,
> But I am sick and I am sad,
> And I need Thee, O Lord.

4. We may apply the text also to the recognition which we give to men—too late. There were two, long centuries ago, who were joined by a Third as they journeyed to Emmaus. And though He opened the Scriptures to them till their hearts were burning, their eyes were holden and they did not know Him. Then they invited Him in to share their evening meal, and in the breaking of the bread their eyes were opened, and they knew Him and He vanished from their sight. When their eyes were opened they saw nothing. The One who was all the world to them was gone. Son, daughter, with a mother who loves you with all a mother's love, see that your recognition of her presence be not a gazing at vacancy like that. You do not dream what pleasure you could give by a little self-sacrifice. Awake! while the days are flying, lest when it is too late your eyes should be terribly opened and *see nothing*.

¶ Young people, look in those eyes, listen to that dear voice, and notice the feeling of even a touch that is bestowed on you by that gentle

[1] W. L. Watkinson, *Frugality in the Spiritual Life*, 124.

hand. Make much of it while yet you have that most precious all of good gifts, a loving mother. Read the unfathomable love of those eyes; the kind anxiety of that tone and look, however slight your pain. In after life you may have friends, fond, dear, kind friends; but never will you have again the inexpressible love and gentleness lavished upon you which none but a mother bestows.[1]

¶ The Vicarage again seemed part of the common working-day world, and Amos, for the first time, felt that he was alone—that day after day, month after month, year after year, would have to be lived through without Milly's love. She was gone from him; and he could never show her his love any more, never make up for omissions in the past by filling future days with tenderness. O the anguish of that thought that we can never atone to our dead for the stinted affection we gave them, for the light answers we returned to their plaints or their pleadings, for the little reverence we showed to that sacred human soul that lived so close to us, and was the divinest thing God had given us to know![2]

5. One thing more. Is it not this that happens when through the Holy Ghost our eyes are opened to see that we are sinners? There was a Pharisee once who came up to the Temple, and who thanked God he was not as other men. He fasted, and was an exemplary person; he was proud of all he was, and all he did. And in that same Temple was a publican whose eyes had been opened by the grace of God, and when his eyes were opened *he saw nothing*. Nothing of all his fasting and his tithing; nothing of all he had ever striven to do. His best was sinful. His life had been a failure. 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' When we see nothing, we see Christ.

O Saviour, I have nought to plead,
In earth beneath or heaven above,
But just my own exceeding need
And Thy exceeding love.

[1] Lord Macaulay. [2] George Eliot.

Chosen for Service

Acts ix. 15.—'Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me.'

As we read the Acts of the Apostles two facts stand out clearly. The first is that the world has been prepared for the gospel. One imperial government—that of Rome—holds all the nations in sway, and one exact and plastic speech—that of Greece—is in almost universal use. The second fact is that the gospel has broken the bounds of the country and creed from which it sprang. The gospel is meant for the world. All that is needed is a channel, an instrument by which it shall be carried out of narrow Palestine, and expounded in all its breadth and spirituality.

1. What kind of man would God choose for this great task?

(1) He must be a Jew, steeped in Jewish thought and custom, and able to understand the ways of God made known to Moses and to interpret the songs sung by David and Isaiah. He must be one who could enter every Jewish synagogue, and declare himself to be an Hebrew of the Hebrews. He must be, among the Jews, a Pharisee. We are accustomed to think scornfully of the Pharisees as hypocrites. Many of them bear an eternal shame. Yet the most earnest men in Palestine were to be found in their ranks. They understood Christ as the Sadducees did not. They discerned the meaning of His message as the multitude failed to do. They saw Him as Roman eyes had no power to see. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus and Gamaliel were Pharisees. The man who was to penetrate Christ's secret, and expound His gospel to the world, must be a Jew out of the ranks of the Pharisees.

But he must be more than a Jew. He required a different birth and a more catholic training. Think of a man like Caiaphas facing a Greek or a Roman audience. Take even Peter and set him to persuade the nations 'whom God hath made of one blood,' and the Galilean fisherman would cut a sorry figure at the task. The man who should be God's instrument must be able not only to speak to every villager in his native tongue, and to pluck out the inmost thought in the mind of a Roman governor, but to stand at Athens, and with a logic full of subtle power, and a

speech instinct with grace, appeal to the eager minds gathered to listen. He must be more than a Jew—he must be a Greek in sympathy and thought and speech.

But he must be more than a Greek. One great world power enforced its commands everywhere, and made its strength felt in the remotest quarter. To be merely a Jew would be to be mocked and flouted at every turn. To be only a Greek would be to be mistrusted and despised. But the man who could rise up and say, 'I am a Roman citizen,' might stand fearlessly in every market-place of the Roman Empire. So in Saul of Tarsus we have a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, but Greek thought mingled in his brain with Hebrew learning, and his Roman citizenship clothed him with freedom.

¶ Paul is fundamentally the Jew. The force, the fire, the depths of his nature are Hebrew; but his Jewish power is tempered and ordered and in a measure guided by his Greek training and his Roman position in the world. I have often used a homely and simple illustration to explain what seems to me to be the right measure of these two influences on Paul's mind. If you take a glass half-filled with wine and add water to it, then the water mingles in and affects every drop of the liquid that fills the glass, but the power and the spirit come from the wine alone. The Greek influence is to temper and to order, but it added no fire to the nature of the great Apostle.[1]

(2) But let us look more closely at Paul, apart from his birth and training. Here our expectations are disappointed. We would expect that God's chosen vessel would have been eloquent and a man of noble presence. In point of fact we have a man with a body so delicate that if he had not spent some years of his life in prison he would not have endured for half his time. A man with a most nervous organization, subject to some disorder, which, whatever it was, made him ridiculous in men's eyes. He was no resplendent hero.

But, some one says, his letters were powerful. If you read them with an observant eye you will find that their thought is often difficult and their phrasing rugged—their power lies mostly in their heart. No other man ever wrote such letters, where a great heart is continually pouring out its treasures of knowledge and love. It is hard to say whether they are fuller of prayers or of tears, of keen reproaches or of tender croonings over those he loves. Read his farewell speech to the elders at Miletus, and mark that when his words were ended he knelt down and commended them in prayer to God, and then, 'They all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.'

¶ What marvellous writing that of Paul is! There is a depth of meaning in it which seems unfathomable. Oh! for more of that man's spirit, his love, his faith, and above all his dauntless intrepidity for Christ. What a hero he was! What a splendid specimen of humanity! I am selfish enough to love him all the more because 'his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible'; and yet no man ever did more for Christ and for Christ's world.[1]

(3) These things help us to understand Paul's personal fascination. But his greatness had a deeper source. His greatness lay in his spiritual nature. He had been a God-thirsty man, and he was now a God-intoxicated man. Across all the centuries we can look and find no man who stood upon so high a spiritual level as Paul, unless it be Moses, the man of God. A man of his dynamic would have become a leader and mover anywhere. But when Christ laid hold upon him, and on the way to Damascus he heard the voice whose echo never died out of his ears, then his nature rose to the full height of its power. His discords were turned to harmony, his bitter anger to tender emotion, his compunctions to peace. He sums up all he became in the words, 'The life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' So when Ananias came in upon him, he found a man prepared for the service of God—'A chosen vessel.'

2. What are the lessons of God's choosing?

(1) The first is that God *chooses only prepared vessels*. We are here upon the verge of the doctrine of election, and a ray of white light shines upon it. It has been made a dogma of horror to tender hearts, yet there is no doctrine more full of grace. It has been sinned against chiefly by being stated as a bare, naked, un-

[1] W. M. Ramsay, *The Teaching of Paul in Terms of the Present Day*, 12.

[1] *Dr MacGregor of St Cuthbert's*, 120.

related, unconditioned truth whose whole depth we have fathomed. There is no truth which can be so conceived and so stated—not even the master truth of the love of God. God's choice is not an arbitrary, capricious, and purposeless self-pleasing. The good pleasure of His will is always an act of infinite purity and infinite pity, as well as of infinite power. Therefore God chooses only prepared vessels. He chose Joseph because, through the passion of his young dreams and the discipline of the pit and the prison, he had been prepared to be a governor of men. He chose Moses, because he had been schooled in the learning of the Egyptians and in the deeper wisdom of the desert, to be the law-giver of His people.

That is still God's mode of choosing. He has chosen us in accordance with our preparation. Our gifts, our equipment, our character have conditioned God's choosing. How illuminating is that truth! Look back on the years gone by. We have wondered at the strange turns and bewildering vicissitudes. We have been bitter because of the severity of our schooling. Now we see it all to be a preparation for God's choosing. Do we think that God has not opened our way for us? Has not opportunity after opportunity opened out before us? But we could not enter into God's open door because we had failed to prepare.

For what are we preparing ourselves? Are we trifling away the morning of life? Are we spending our hours in frivolous pleasures? The noontide shall find us unprepared, and, therefore, not chosen for its nobler tasks. Or are our maturer years being spent in self-indulgence? Then we shall never be chosen for the great services of the Kingdom. We shall stand in our lot at the end of our day. But that will not be any place of high service in the Kingdom of God.

¶ Charles Simeon, whose curate Henry Martyn was at Cambridge, used to say, as he looked at Martyn's portrait, which hung in his dining-room: 'There, see that blessed man! What an expression of countenance! No one looks at me as he does; he never takes his eyes off me, and seems always to be saying, "Be serious — be in earnest — don't trifle — don't trifle."' Then smiling at the picture, and gently bowing, he would add, 'And I won't trifle—I won't trifle.' [1]

[1] J. Flew, *Saints of Yesterday*, 173.

(2) The second lesson is that *the consummating preparation is by the grace of God.* That is true of all place and of all service. Whatever may be a man's gifts, or aptitudes, or training, or experience, he is not fitted for the work he ought to do except by the grace of God. Even genius has not achieved its highest without this completing blessing. Think how Paul wasted himself when he did not know the power of the grace of God! What violence he did to his nature! Who could have dreamed that behind the persecutor's drawn face and his eyes gleaming with hate there was one of the tenderest hearts ever lodged within a human breast? Who could have believed that that narrow-minded bigot could have yearned after a whole world and seen in his midnight dream the brotherhood of man? But when he had yielded to the grace of God his faculties were unbound, his nature blossomed out into loveliness, his gifts put on their strength, and he found the work and the place of his destiny. And he knew the secret of it all: 'By the grace of God I am what I am.'

How many are passing on to shame with their powers squandered, their capacities narrowed, their natures stunted for lack of this grace of God! Every family has its sorrowful story of son or daughter whom this baptism of God's love in Christ would have saved and ennobled. Let the young and the unstained whom God has been following as a shadow, and let those who have had years of disregard, or, as Saul of Tarsus had, years of deadly antipathy behind them, even now yield themselves to God, become assured of His love, and let His grace change their minds and hearts, and they will find themselves vessels chosen to serve.

¶ O God, who alone knowest the heart of man, if the thought and purpose of my heart be upright before Thee, vouchsafe even yet in Thy mercy in this my decay of life, an interval of strength: if so, Thy grace assisting me, I may make some compensation for the wasted talents Thou hast entrusted to me, and the neglected opportunities which Thy loving-kindness had provided. Let me be found a labourer in Thy vineyard, though of the late hour, when the Lord Himself calleth for His servant.[1]

[1] S. T. Coleridge.

Suffering as an Incentive to Service

Acts ix. 16.—'For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.'

1. Not how many or how great things he must do, but how many things he must suffer. The Lord does not say, 'I will shew him how many things he will dare and do and win: how he will bear the gospel to borders of the West: how he will vindicate the spiritual freedom of believers: how he will present to the eyes of men the vision of a Church as broad as humanity;' but simply this, 'I will shew him how many things he must suffer.' This is his service; and as Paul recalls the Christian martyrs he glories in the fact that he is chosen to carry on the work he hindered. His Master knew what manner of man it was on whom He was laying His hand of consecration, and He knew that nothing could so stir and nerve him as to show him on each perilous march the multitude of the things which he should suffer in His cause.

The promise was given, and it was made good. St Paul tells us that he bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. He also carried about in his soul the ever-haunting, and ever-sustaining knowledge, that, go where he might, fresh sufferings awaited him.

And, we may believe, bonds were but the smallest part of his afflictions. Imprisonment, with its rest and its silences, must often have come to him as a relief. The chief hardships which racked that Apostolic spirit were of a different order. They were the hardships which 'war against the soul' of every great Christian leader. They were the pangs of solitude; a heart craving for sympathy and never finding it in full; the hatred of his countrymen; the suspicion of the devout; the discovery that where he preached the Cross of Jesus, that symbol of brotherhood, party factions and unseemly jealousies sprang up; the discovery further that, as at Corinth, the new-born society, for which he would gladly have given his life, was degraded both by gross vices and by petty animosities; the constant disillusions, known only to great Founders and great Inspirers, of seeing the love of the many waxing cold—such were but a few of the long roll of sufferings which the Lord gradually disclosed to His servant as the reward and the incentive of his lifelong service.

¶ Here are a few sentences taken from Henry Martyn's Journal and Letters. 'Suffering,' he writes, 'is my daily appointed portion.' Again, in the month of October, towards the end of his life: 'Since last January I have heard nothing of any one person whom I love.' 'My time passes happily with God: I have no other companion.' But most notably in the midst of persecutions he exclaims, 'How many times in the day have I occasion to repeat the words:

> If on my face, for Thy dear name,
> Shame and reproaches be;
> All hail reproach, and welcome shame,
> If Thou remember me.

2. Do we realize how large a part that which appeared to be failure and pain had in the fulfilment of the Apostle's mission? We cannot help seeing how disappointment and sorrow purified and strengthened his personal character—how they gave tenderness to his sympathies, largeness to his tolerance, massiveness and solidity to his absolute trust in God. But what of their outward results?

To take one illustration only. Most of the letters through which he speaks with a living voice to all ages were called out by distressing anxieties, or written from confinement. The Epistles to the Thessalonians were due to an exceeding desire to learn something of the state of the Church from which he had been suddenly hurried away, and then hindered from visiting. The Corinthians, by their divisions and questions, drew from him the portraiture of love and the statement of the gospel of the Resurrection. The apostasy of the Galatians stirred him to a burning denunciation of legal righteousness. Even the studied exposition of the Faith addressed to the Romans was due in part to the frustration of his purpose to visit them. As a prisoner, first at Cæsarea and then at Rome, he might seem to have been kept from the true sphere of his energy, and it is to that period of calm labour that we owe the fuller views of the Person of the Lord and the larger conception of the Church which are given in the Epistles of the Captivity.

3. Think upon the prospect of suffering, not as the condition only, but as the attraction, of a life's career. The words are startling. We are assuming what experience, or what is too

hastily called experience, the experience of the average, seems to deny. We are going in the teeth of not a few established maxims. If we ever try to sketch out a career either for a friend or for ourselves, in what colours do we fill it in? Are they not, to put the matter briefly, the colours of success? And is it not taken for granted that success means happiness?

Here we are on the beaten path of approved experience. If it be the path of common place, is it not the path of common sense also? It may be, but as long as we keep within the atmosphere which surrounds such counsels, we scarcely seem to breathe the atmosphere of the Gospels. The spirit of the Gospels is heroic, or it is nothing. Just as the Master said of old, 'Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven,' so we seem to hear Him say of all such counsels of imperfection, Except your incentives to a life's career shall be nobler than the incentives popularly accepted as sufficient, you have yet to learn the meaning of My service.

We say it is the language of paradox, but then is it not the language of Christ? Or we say, Jesus is speaking in these tones to St Paul, one of the most exceptional men that ever lived. Can we treat of so exceptional a man as if he were in any sense typical of ourselves? Does it follow that, because the Master, who knew him through and through, called him a 'chosen vessel,' and entrusted to him a work unique in history, He therefore speaks in like language to us whose lives are so quiet, so normal, so hedged in by a thousand well-recognized limits, so tamed down by a thousand well-worn yet perhaps blameless conventionalities?

Here we are starting the question, What is the spiritual value of ideals? Do we gain most light from counsels specially adapted to our own recognized standard of conduct, or from appeals which point to the highest standard of all, and say boldly, 'Do good, hoping for nothing again; Rejoice and be exceeding glad when ye are called to suffer for My Name; Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect?'

These words are not words only. Heroic and saintly spirits find in the prospect of suffering for a great cause and a loved Master a charm beyond every other charm, and even the less heroic and the less saintly find in these appeals something which lays hold on a genuine part of themselves. They even find in them just the one force which stirs them most, and makes them ask whether the atmosphere of their own lives cannot now receive the infusion of some fresh elements of daring and devotion. The heart insists on finding in the almost superhuman example some kinship to its own poor self. 'I too am a Christian' is the exclamation, possibly a self-revealing exclamation, wrung from the inmost depths of an almost unsuspected personality. Thousands of men and women, we say, have learnt not only to face but to love suffering for the sake of Christ; and though we shall never equal them, yet we feel that that welcoming of suffering, which makes all of one spiritual blood, has a charm for us also. Far from repelling, it attracts us.

¶ In Gordon of Khartoum we see a man exposed to just the same vulgarizing temptations as ourselves, yet calmly and systematically from early manhood putting them by—hating fame and applause, passionately devoted to weak causes, haunted by the consciousness of being God's instrument, and hailing as a mark of Christ's approval the suffering, bodily and mental, to which he was hourly exposed. In the closing scene, when treachery had opened the river gate, the soldiers of the enemy poured in, led by some of their chiefs, who made for the Governor's palace. Two of Gordon's friends rushed to him to warn him of the danger. They found him walking calmly on the balcony which overlooks the Nile. One of them said to him, 'Fly, while there is yet time. Go in at the little door, and take the boat.' Gordon answered, 'Shall I fly and leave my post? That would indeed be a disgrace. I shall not fly.' He left the balcony, stepped to the head of the grand staircase, met there some of the Mahdi's chief generals, and in a few moments was cut down.[1]

Some of us have still to lay down the lines of our life. Whether brilliant or obscure, they may not only be Christian in the popular acceptance of the word—which, in truth, is very poor and very unsatisfying—but they may be heroic; they may have in them just that one product of the Christian faith which in the days of our youth seems to us almost the greatest and most characteristic—the readiness to dare something, to face something, to suffer

[1] H. M. Butler, *University and Other Sermons*, 89.

something, if only Christ count us worthy. Do not ask only, How many things or how great things can I do? What giant evil can I strike down? What shape of social falsehood can I unmask? What new form of innocent pleasure can I invent or organize or help to diffuse among the poor, the uncultured, the degraded? All these are worthy aims, but there is a yet worthier—How best can we drink of the cup that Christ drank so deeply? How can we best confront failure, disappointment, disillusion, misrepresentation, injustice? Where are the lost causes, the forlorn hopes, the discredited impossibilities on which that which is most Divine in us can, by the grace of our Lord, fasten?

Not to a dull or lonely pilgrimage
The Lord of High Adventure summons us.
Nay, rather for a hazard glorious
Christ claims our lives, bids us a conflict wage
Of risks unbounded, asking that we take
His vision for our standard: 'Follow Me,'
His simple challenge, calls us steadfastly
To march through fire and water for His sake.
So, in our hope, endeavour, joy, and woe,
His comradeship smiles on us; failure-worn
He cheers us, gives new vision every day,
Fresh heights for us to win, as forth we go,
Knights to a quest of life abundant sworn,
The end Christ's kingdom, and Christ's love the way.

Unreserved Forgiveness

Acts ix. 17.—'Brother Saul.'

To Ananias of Damascus, who lives in sacred history because of the events of one outstanding day, there was given a commission unparalleled in the annals of Christianity. He was the chosen of God to bring to the stricken soul of Saul, the persecutor, that comfort and that knowledge of the grace of God which were to transfigure his life and change the whole current of his sympathies and labours. For that brief day he was both the prophet and the priest of God to Saul's broken heart.

1. Ananias knew that Saul had come to Damascus armed with credentials to wipe out the Christian Church. He knew that outside the Gate of Damascus something had happened to this Saul—something which made it no longer possible for him to carry out his wild design. Further, he had learned that a great softness and gentleness and misgiving had come over the heart of this former enemy. And with all these things something had come to himself, something so urgent, so unlike what he himself would have thought of doing if left to himself, that God must be behind it; something which commanded him to go without delay to the side of this stricken man.

Ananias is given a difficult commission. Awed at the vastness of the Divine purpose he hesitated, but 'the Lord said unto him, Go thy way . . . and Ananias departed.' That sounds very simple. A fine but difficult impulse comes to a man to get up and do something, and he gets up and does it. That seems very simple. And yet that is—everything. If we were all to get up and do the fine things which look at us and convince us, if we were all to rise the moment a fine thing knocks at the door of our heart, we could have the Kingdom of God any day.

2. And now, behold Ananias at the door of a house belonging to one Judas, in a street called Straight. As the door opened he saw in front of him the figure of a helpless blind man. What an opportunity for a man of meaner build than Ananias! How justly he might have upbraided him for those days of fierce slaughter. But Saul needed none of this. In those three days of solitude his soul had been pierced with sorrow barbed with remorse. Shut in with himself, his memory alert and his conscience smarting, what did he not endure! How he recalled the familiar faces,

Dear men and women, whom I sought and slew,

and how he vowed,

Ah when we mingle in the heavenly places
How will I weep to Stephen and to you!

How differently Ananias got through his difficult task, with what knowledge of the soul—so that, taking the way he took, we may believe he found it not nearly so hard as he had supposed it would be. He went right up to this man and, laying his hand upon him, said, 'Brother Saul.'

It was as though he had said, 'I don't know where you have reached, but that's where I am.' Now we may say, 'But that was a hard thing to do: I could never do a thing like that.' And yet it was easier to do it that way than in a grudging or less hearty way. If a man asks you to go a mile with him, go two miles, said Jesus: meaning, it is easier. And certainly it is easier to do a painful thing heartily than an inch at a time. Once we have been over the head, the water is not so cold, so that we blame ourselves for shivering so long in the shallows. Here we have the support of the psychologists, who have the maxim that in breaking away into any new habit we should begin strongly, and commit ourselves so publicly and notoriously that we shall be ashamed to withdraw or to change the posture of our soul.

Before he knew what he was going to do he had done it, and before he found his great words he had uttered them. 'Laying his hands upon him, he said, Brother Saul.' In all the circumstances, these are among the noblest words ever spoken. So long as men are to be found who can speak this great language, the human race will recover and survive. Compared with this great way of speaking, how coarse and shameful are all words uttered in mere anger or vengeance! When we hear words of this order spoken to one who had set out to commit murder by one of those whom he had proposed to murder—why, we come within view of something in the soul of a man which makes him not too incredibly the son of God. For this explosion of forgiveness and compassion—'Brother Saul'—sets him from whose heart it broke not far from our Lord, who out of the agony of the driven nails cried, 'Father, forgive them.'

¶ After the murder of her husband, Gladstone's 'right hand man' in his financial and in his Irish policy, Lady Frederick Cavendish wrote in her *Diary*: 'All my blessed joy of many years wrecked in the darkness. But then Uncle W. himself came in. . . . I saw his face, pale, sorrow-stricken, but like a prophet's in its look of faith and strength. He came up and almost took me in his arms, and his first words were, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

'Then he said to me, "Be assured it will not be in vain," and across my agony there fell a bright ray of hope, and I saw in a vision Ireland at peace, and my darling's life-blood accepted as a sacrifice for Christ's sake, to help to bring this to pass.

'I said to him as he was leaving me, "Uncle William, you must never blame yourself for sending him." He said, "Oh, no, there can be no question of that."'

'On his tomb,' Mr John Bailey, who edits the *Diary*, tells us, 'was engraved "Died," so that there might be no memorial of the cruel crime in stone; and every day of the long years of her widowhood she prayed specially for Ireland.'

3. That of course is Christianity. It is what we trust to as being in God. It is the final doctrine and idea of our faith that things in the history of the human race had reached a head. Men's sins and passions and stupidities had combined, and together had infected the world. There seemed no way out. Christ came. He saw the only way out, and Himself took it. And what was it that He saw? Well, it was something which had dawned upon the finest souls of His own race in their finest and most poignant hours. It was what Isaiah saw already at work in the tragic sorrows of *his* nation. It is what Sophocles declared in the *Oedipus at Colonus* and in the *Antigone*. It is what Shakespeare put into the mouth of Portia, and Browning into the mouth of David in *Saul*. But for us who know the story of Jesus it is the very heart and business of His mission to this world. And what is it? Just that we human beings are mixed and wayward creatures, who hurt each other and sow great sorrows in this world. That the things we do become seeds of later events and consequences, like fields sown with dragon's teeth which spring up armed men. That things are what they are, and the consequences will be what they will be. That if there is nothing but strict justice in this world, nothing but that in God or in man—then are we all in one plight. But our faith is that there is something else in God and in man: in God already and from all eternity, and in man we trust increasingly. Something which bares its bosom willingly to the retributions of inexorable justice, and, taking to itself the penalties that are due, loses them in its own mighty forgiveness, in the ocean of its compassion. All that is already in God. It is the very heart of God in the Christian view. And

we believe that only by the active presence of the same patience and forgiveness and forgetfulness of injuries, and by the same doing of good one to another, can the impending doom of this unhappy world be averted and the darkness turn towards day.

Justice doth call for vengeance on my sins,
And threaten death as guerdon for the same ;
Mercy to plead for pardon then begins,
With saying, Christ hath undergone the shame.
Justice shows me an angry God offended,
And mercy shows a Saviour crucified :
Justice says, I that sinned must be condemned ;
Mercy replies, Christ for my sins hath died.
Grim Justice threats with a vengeful rod :
Meek Mercy shows me an appeased God.
Lord ! though my sins make me for Justice fit,
Through Christ—let Mercy triumph over it.

4. If there is some one living in a state of hostility towards us, there are two courses either of which may be followed, and it will depend upon our own inmost character which we shall choose. On the one hand, we may allow that other's hostility to make us hostile, his injury of us to make our anger mount and clamour for revenge ; by which we do our best to make our hearts a lair of what Bunyan called hell-hounds.

¶ In a letter to his wife, George Macdonald says : 'I was preaching last Sunday about forgiveness, and I felt that not to forgive was just to send one to the hell of our little universe. Not to be forgiven and taken in by any human heart is the worst mishap that can befall. May I be taught a lesson hard to learn. You do not need it so deeply as I do—you only break out in thunder and lightning ! I have a cold smile deep in my heart like a moth-eaten hole, when I feel really wronged.[1]

But there is another way which we may take, if only we will allow ourselves to be as good as we are being urged to be by Someone who knows us so well that He must be God. We may refuse to become hard or bitter or vengeful. This we may do—not indeed without prayer, and not without the shedding of our spiritual blood. And, to the extent that we take upon ourselves this other's sin, we stay and subdue within our own souls a force which, if it had freedom, would add to the sadness and confusion of the world.

But it may be, our task in these days is not so hard as that. It may be that our enemy is in that pause and silence of his own exhausted passion when, who knows, some indisputable kindness might let loose within him 'a most baptismal flood of tears.' It may be that at this moment, in spite of words of bluster here and there, he is sitting like Saul, alone, confused, with the scales still upon his eyes, waiting for some touch of kindness and some word from the old mother tongue of the human race, some word which sounds to him like 'brother.' Whereupon, the scales may fall from his eyes and he may see the truth through his tears, as perhaps we all of us see truth only through our tears.

¶ Burne-Jones has a drawing of a knight who, riding alone, saw before him in a secluded place one approaching him who had done him a wrong. Armed as he was to the teeth, the knight knew that he had his enemy in his power and could wreak his will upon him. As the memory of the wrong done to him was mounting in his blood, his eyes fell upon a Calvary by the wayside, an upraised figure of our Blessed Lord upon the Cross. Whereupon something went soft within him. Dismounting and leaving his horse to wander at its will, he knelt down at the foot of the Cross, and there remained in prayer, crucifying the wild lust for vengeance. Whereupon a strange thing happened, though a thing most familiar when we interpret it in the spirit. The figure of Christ stooped down from the Cross and the lips of Jesus kissed the bowed head of His faithful servant. And the enemy on whom he thought to wreak his vengeance passed by unharmed. And the good knight had no regrets, but on the contrary was tasting, as we perhaps can taste only in moments of renunciation when we withstand some tumult of the blood, that Peace of God which passeth all understanding.[1]

[1] *George Macdonald and His Wife*, 221.

[1] J. A. Hutton, *The Victory over Victory*, 173.

A Generous Soul

Acts ix. 27.—'But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus' (R.V.).

Acts xi. 25, 26.—'And he went forth to Tarsus to seek for Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch' (R.V.).

THAT is a very suggestive bit of Bible arithmetic at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy where it says that one shall chase a thousand, and two shall put ten thousand to flight. Not, one shall chase a thousand, and two shall chase two thousand, but one shall chase a thousand, and two shall put ten thousand to flight. When you put two workers down instead of one, you do more than double the output; you increase it tenfold, Moses says. For you not only have two workers instead of one, but the energies and powers of these workers are multiplied almost indefinitely by mutual sympathy and encouragement and inspiration. They are able to strengthen one another's hands in God. That is why Paul, when he set out on a missionary journey, never did so without a companion. He hungered for sympathy, and was never at his best except in the midst of friends.

People often say that such and such a great man was the 'discovery' of someone else. Sir William Robertson Nicoll, for instance, claimed to have 'discovered' J. M. Barrie and Ian Maclaren. He was the man who first recognized their genius and urged them to write. In very much the same way Barnabas 'discovered' Paul. He was the man who first recognized Paul's earnestness and ability, and who first introduced him to Christian work. We are not claiming that Barnabas had the same kind of influence over Paul that Stephen had. He did not, so far as we know, influence Paul's method of thinking. Barnabas was not a great master of the mind. What he did was to save Paul for the Church. If Stephen had not prayed there would not have been a Paul to discover; but if Barnabas had not been a man of believing and generous spirit Paul might never have been saved for the evangelistic work of the Christian Church. Twice over Barnabas 'saved' Paul in that sense, kept a grip on him and preserved him from alienation and despair.

1. *Barnabas' Generosity to Paul.*—The first occasion was on the visit which Paul paid to Jerusalem after his conversion. The disciples at Jerusalem cold-shouldered him. There was every excuse for their suspicion. When Paul was in Jerusalem last, he was the most active and bitter of their persecutors. When he left Jerusalem it was to go to Damascus with power and authority from the Jewish priests to make what havoc he could among the Christians in that Eastern city. That the original persecutor should in the interval have become a believer was more than they could credit. They thought that his attempt to join them was just a ruse in order to discover their secrets, and denounce them to the authorities.

It does not require a very great exercise of the imagination to realize that the primitive Church by its suspiciousness and by its coldness ran a great risk of losing Paul. In these days of ours, coldness and aloofness have chilled the ardour of many a young disciple. There are people outside the Church altogether just because they have not been kindly received by the people inside the Church. Imagine Paul's feelings on coming to Jerusalem and finding himself frozen out by the Christians there after that tremendous experience of his on the way to Damascus. We cannot believe that he would ever have lost his faith, but he might easily have been lost to the Church. And it was then that Barnabas came to the rescue. He introduced Paul to the Apostles and rehearsed his story to them and secured for him a welcome, although a tardy one.

And it was Barnabas who subsequently saved Paul for the active ministry of the Church. After a brief stay in Jerusalem, Paul had gone back to his native town of Tarsus, and the Church was quite content to let him go. And there it might have let him remain, allowing his mighty gifts to rest unused, had it not been for Barnabas. You remember that Barnabas was sent on a certain occasion to inspect the work that had been begun in the great city of Antioch in Syria. Some unknown Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene, not authorized delegates but just lay people, had taken the matter into their own hands, and when they reached Antioch, that great city on the Orontes, they had not been content simply to preach to the Jews but spoke quite freely to the Greeks also. When the news of this preaching to the

Gentiles reached Jerusalem it created great anxiety in the little primitive Church, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch to inspect and report. Barnabas recognized the work as being the work of the grace of God, and, instead of criticizing it, flung himself into it with all his heart and soul. But the work grew too big for any one man to lead. And, casting about for a colleague, Barnabas remembered Paul. He knew that his friend was a man of brilliant gifts and tremendous force of character, the very man for the business. So Barnabas set out for Tarsus and, having found Paul, dragged him out of his retirement and brought him to Antioch.

¶ You would not send a blind man to the Academy. You would not send a deaf man to write a critique upon some oratorio. And in the realm of grace there are some things which the mere reporter can never report. The unequipped reporter would go to Jerusalem and he would see the happenings of Pentecost, and this would be his report: 'These men are full of new wine.' He would go to Wales and pass from meeting to meeting, and from town to town, and this would be the headline of his lively and flippant column: 'Hysteria!' And such a man would have gone to Antioch, at the outbreak of this great revival, and he would have witnessed nothing but confusion, and he would have heard nothing but the rowdy ejaculations of an alien tongue. 'Eyes have they, but they see not.' Yes, we must send the right reporter. If Jerusalem would know what is doing at Antioch, everything depends upon the character and spring of its agent.[1]

That was the beginning of Paul's active ministry. Barnabas' introduction of him to the work in Antioch was the real commencement of that career of flaming evangelism which resulted in the spread of the gospel through all the countries that intervened between Jerusalem and Rome.

2. *Barnabas' Generosity in the Matter of Money.*—Barnabas was one of those who set the example of selling their goods for the benefit of the Christian Church at Jerusalem. He had a field and sold it, and, we are told, laid the price thereof at the apostles' feet. Among those simple peasants, fishermen, and other working-folk who constituted the early Church Barnabas was a man of property, and, in this respect, socially above the majority of the brotherhood. But this he ceased to be, putting himself on a level with the rest, and henceforth having to maintain himself entirely by the labour of his hands. He may not have been a rich man; but he had to face the rich man's difficulty, which Jesus held to be an insuperable hindrance to entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven without the special aid of God, with whom all things are possible.

Of course it is possible to make too much of this one act of generosity on the part of Barnabas. We need not exalt him to the skies simply because this deed is recorded in the Bible, and ignore the fact that more remarkable sacrifices are told us of men in later days. Church history abounds with instances of people who gave up everything and took poverty as their bride. St Francis not only abandoned his home and all he possessed; he took off his clothes and dressed himself only in the old garments tossed to him as a beggar. Less fantastic and vastly more self-sacrificing was his devotion of his whole life to follow in the footsteps of Christ as exactly as possible. Not less noble is the life of such a man as Francis Crossley—'the modern St Francis'—who, though a most prosperous manufacturer who might have lived like a prince, chose to spend a simple life among his own work-people, devoting himself and his large business profits to the good of his fellow-men. But, while there is no reason to exaggerate the importance of this one act of Barnabas, it is interesting as exhibiting at the very first the leading trait of his character—his abounding generosity.

3. *Barnabas' Generosity in his Judgment of People.*—It was not in the matter of money only that Barnabas was generous. He was extraordinarily generous in his judgment of people. He believed the best of everybody. He believed in Paul, believed in his sincerity and genuineness in spite of his bad record in the matter of persecution. He believed in those people at Antioch—in their conversion and acceptance with God—although they had submitted to no Jewish rite. And by this generosity of spirit he saved many for the Church and for God. There never was such an encourager and helper as Barnabas. Such a genius was he at this work of strengthening people and lifting them out of their despairs, that the apostles gave

[1] J. H. Jowett, in *The Examiner*, May 25, 1905.

him this name. His name was originally Joseph, but they changed it to Barnabas. The English phrase 'son of consolation' is too narrow for Luke's original expression. For the word rendered 'consolation'—*paraklesis*, cognate to which is *paraklete*—means also encouragement, exhortation, cheering helpfulness. Barnabas was recognized as a man who brought cheer and gladness wherever he went, one of those men whose very presence is like sunshine.

¶ Dick Sunshine was not his real name; at least so they said. But the thing that they called his real name did not describe him a scrap; it seemed to abandon all attempt at description as hopelessly impossible; but when you called him Dick Sunshine it fitted him like a glove. That is the immense advantage that nicknames possess over real names. Of all real things, real names are the most unreal. There is no life in them. They stand for nothing; they express nothing; they reveal nothing. They bear no kind of relationship to the unfortunate individuals who are sentenced to wear them, like meaningless badges, for the term of their natural lives. But nicknames, on the other hand, sparkle and flash; they bring the man himself vividly and palpitatingly before you; and, without more introduction or ado, you know him at once for what he is.[1]

You remember what our Lord said about binding or unloosing. We are all of us binding or unloosing the whole time. The harsh and critical people are always binding their sin upon folk. The people who believe in them, who believe the best, are always helping to unloose them from the bondage of their sins. If we want to have a part in Christ's blessed work, we must learn to love the people who need to be saved. This love for the people is a potent redeeming energy in itself.

¶ It is said of our great Lord Shaftesbury that part of the secret of his success in helping people on to their feet was his faith in them. There is a story told of how a man came straight from jail to his house, and how the good Earl, who had every honour that Britain could give, grasped his hand and welcomed him and said, 'We will make a man of you yet'; and that man was encouraged to fight against his besetting sin simply because of Lord Shaftesbury's trust in him. He came to believe a new life was possible for him because that great and good man believed in him.

[1] F. W. Boreham, *Mushrooms on the Moor*, 85.

There is another aspect of Barnabas' generosity in dealing with people. One mark of a real love, of a real generosity of soul, is the absence of jealousy. The small-souled man is always mean and envious and self-assertive; but the really generous soul is self-forgetful.

¶ There is a story of William Jay, a great English preacher, a product of the evangelistic revival, that when he was getting old his deacons proposed to get a colleague for him. But the old gentleman was jealous for his position, and when his deacons made the proposition he said to them, 'Well, you see, gentlemen, when two people ride on the back of one horse, one rides first; and,' he said, 'I mean to ride first.'

Barnabas was so generous that he had no room for envy in his heart. When he went for Paul to Tarsus, and brought him back with him to Antioch, he knew quite well what he was doing. He knew that to bring Paul in would inevitably mean that he would have to take second place. That is exactly what happened. 'Barnabas and Paul' is the order in Acts xiii., but by chapter xv. it is 'Paul and Barnabas.' But Barnabas cared nothing for place or dignity so long as the work of God went on.

¶ There was no littleness, no self-seeking in Collier. This is revealed in a conversation with his friend, Gipsy Smith. 'Why are you so anxious,' said the Gipsy, 'to pull in this man and that and the other? Why do you not take the place yourself?' 'Gipsy,' said Collier, 'I am out for the kingdom; it is the kingdom that matters to me, and the moment I find a man who is a quarter of an inch bigger than I am, and can do the work better than I can, I am ready to get him his crowd, to hold his coat and back him, while he does it.'[1]

4. *Barnabas' Generosity towards the Weak.*—Barnabas was the companion of the Apostle on his first missionary tour; he stood by Paul in his great fight for Gentile freedom. But this sad fact needs to be added if the whole story is to be told: Paul and Barnabas quarrelled. It came about on account of John Mark, who was Barnabas' nephew. John Mark had been their attendant in the first missionary journey, but he left them at a critical point. Luke does not tell us why. When they were preparing for

[1] G. Jackson, *Collier of Manchester*, 103.

their second journey, Barnabas again wanted to take Mark, but Paul was for running no risk. And over John Mark these two friends who had been so much to one another quarrelled and parted.

Evidently the Church at Antioch was on the side of Paul in this quarrel. Paul stands for strict justice; Barnabas once again stands for generosity. And we feel that in pleading for a second chance for the young man Barnabas was just giving expression to the mind of Christ. He was nearer Christ then than Paul was. He was generous enough to believe that a failure might become a success, and a coward a brave and steadfast man. And so, even at the cost of parting with Paul, he was resolved that Mark should have his second chance.

Yes, and the second chance saved him. Paul himself acknowledges it. In one of the last letters that came from Paul's pen he writes to Timothy like this: 'Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.'

Once like a broken bow Mark sprang aside;
Yet grace recalled him to a worthier course,
To feeble hands and knees increasing force,
Till God was magnified.

And now a strong Evangelist, St Mark
Hath for his sign a Lion in his strength;
And thro' the stormy water's breadth and length
He helps to steer God's Ark.

Thus calls he sinners to be penitents,
He kindles penitents to high desire,
He mounts before them to the sphere of saints,
And bids them come up higher.[1]

Dorcas

Acts ix. 39.—'Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.'

Joppa, where Dorcas lived and laboured, is a place of great antiquity. Those who have read Charles Kingsley's *Heroes*, and who remember how Perseus rescued Andromeda, will be interested in knowing that the old world believed that it was at Joppa that Andromeda was chained. It was here that the materials were landed which were used in the building of the Temple. And it was from the port of Joppa that Jonah sailed, when he thought to fly from the presence of the Lord. Here, then, lived Tabitha.

Tabitha, or Dorcas, may herself have been a widow. She was one of those women of means and leisure who were to be found in the apostolic Church, and whose ability and willingness to 'minister' to their fellow-Christians accounted for their prominence in the communities to which they belonged. But we need not suppose that her activities were confined to making 'the coats and garments' which the widows displayed after her death. Her house may have been one of those in which a congregation met; and if so there would have been wide scope for her energies. At all events she was a person of considerable importance in the Church at Joppa and one whose loss was a matter of the gravest concern. St Chrysostom remarks that it is not without reason that St Luke has recorded her name: 'for the name she bore corresponded to her character—as active and wakeful was she as a *dorcas*, or gazelle.'

Woman's work in the Church is no novelty invented by this ingenious, innovating twentieth century. Here we trace it back to New Testament times. Nearly every woman among the early disciples mentioned in the Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles is associated with some form of Christian service. The primitive churches were hives of industry. A subtle change had come over the position of women since the dawn of Christianity, and we find them taking their place in the Christian community with a simple dignity—men and women alike servants of the Lord Christ.

What were the qualities Dorcas used in her Master's service? They were mainly two—a loving Christ-taught heart, and a skilful generous hand.

1. Dorcas was *a woman of a loving heart.* It is said that 'prosperity gains friends but adversity tries them.' It was not so with her. Adversity was to her the sole passport to friendship. Wherever need or sickness, poverty or death, were stretching out pale and piteous

[1] Christina G. Rossetti.

hands, there was always one hand ready to grasp them and lift them up. And thus she was 'always wanted.' For as long as the world lasts the cry of human need will always be heard, and they who can hear it and answer it will never be out of request. And, being in request, they will always be happy. They will never know the dark shadow of *ennui*, for their life will have no vacant places, and in the midst of it all there will ever be upspringing the fountain of the joy of 'the blessed God.' God Himself is 'blessed for ever' because He is the giving God, and His creatures can have no secret of purer and more permanent happiness.

How was Dorcas led to her life of loving helpfulness? No doubt there was something in her environment that pointed that way. She appears to stand alone in the world. She appears, too, to have been in easy if not affluent circumstances. She had time to devote her life to something else than her own support. In a self-centred life there are few conditions more certain to spell out misery and ill-health. No need to work! No interest in life!

¶ A very practical outcome in the mission work was the organization of the Fisher Lads' Letter-Writing Association. The members accepted so many names of orphan lads at sea and pledged themselves to write regularly to them. I remember one lady whose whole care in life had been her own health. She had nursed it, and worried over it, and enjoyed ill-health so long, that only the constant recourse to the most refined stimulants postponed the end which would have been a merciful relief—to others. The effort of letter-writing remade her. Doctors were forgotten, stimulants were tabooed, the insignia of invalidism banished, and to my intense surprise I ran across her at a fishing port surrounded by a bevy of blue-jerseyed lads, who were some of those whom she was being blessed by helping.[1]

Dorcas would have been in a sad plight if it had not been for one thing—the main thing in all her history, the mainspring of all her activities, the keynote of all the beautiful music of her life: she loved the Lord Jesus Christ. 'There was at Joppa a certain *disciple* called Dorcas.' A 'disciple'—a learner, a pupil. But she had learned to some purpose. She had learned the meaning of that new commandment, 'Love one another as I have loved you.' And she had learned that a truth becomes altogether different to you when you realize it in action. She had learned that when the Lord loved men, He was not content to say it but to do it; that it meant days of weariness and nights of prayer; that it meant healing the sick and feeding the hungry and saving the lost. And so the new commandment, 'as I have loved you,' became new to her and new to Joppa, when men saw through their dark streets this angel of mercy going from house to house, with a smile on her face and—*a parcel in her hand!* How much the world wants this practical love of Christ!

¶ As Ruskin puts it, there are 'flowers that could bless you for having blessed them, and will love you for having loved them. Far among the moorlands and the rocks—far in the darkness of the terrible streets—these feeble florets are lying with all their fresh leaves torn and their stems broken; will you never go down to them, nor set them in order in their little fragrant beds, nor fence them in their trembling from the fierce wind?'[1]

If I can live
To make some pale face brighter, and to give
  A second lustre to some tear-dimmed eye,
Or e'en impart
One throb of comfort to an aching heart,
  Or cheer some way-worn soul in passing by;

If I can lend
A strong hand to the fallen, or defend
  The right against a single envious strain,
My life, though bare
Perhaps of much that seemeth dear and fair
  To us on earth, will not have been in vain.

The purest joy,
Most near to heaven, far from earth's alloy,
  Is bidding clouds give way to sun and shine,
    And 'twill be well
    If on that day of days the angels tell
Of me: 'She did her best for one of Thine.'

2. Dorcas had not merely the priceless gift of a loving heart, she had also *a skilful and, above all, an enterprising hand.*

Looking into the satchel of her possibilities, she saw that she had not many talents there. She was not what the world would call a gifted

[1] *A Labrador Doctor*: W. T. Grenfell, 97.

[1] *Sesame and Lilies*, § 94.

woman. She could not 'prophesy' like the daughters of Philip. She had not the rare poetic soul of the author of 'the Magnificat.' No; but there was one gift lying there that she might use for the Master. She had a skilful hand. And she was a woman of initiative, who could strike out a new idea, and, which is harder, realize it. In the meeting, while the others were preaching and praying, Dorcas would be silent; but when the meeting was over you would have seen her in her little home busy late and early, making garments by which she clothed the widows and orphans of Joppa. And thus, without knowing it, she became a kind of pioneer in Christian work, and made herself famous in the Church as the founder of 'Dorcas societies.' What wonders the needle has wrought since then in the hands of loving women; what garments it has made to clothe the hungry; what churches it has built; what missions it has equipped. What an aid it has been to the Christian Church.

Now the lesson of all this is not confined to women. We can all gain that priceless gift of initiative which experience tells us so truly is a thing that is always 'wanted.' And we can do so by 'loving much.' Initiative is the child of love. Love will always find out the way. If the way be impossible by the ordinary track, it will strike out a new one of its own. Out of our weakness we become strong. Out of our limitations we rise into the rank of Christian pioneers.

When Tabitha died we get a glimpse of the scene—'all the widows stood by him weeping,' and showing the garments which she had made. We see how sincerely she was mourned. She had not only done good, which does not always ensure love, but she was good. And now they felt she had died too soon. In their trouble some one thought of Peter, who was only a few miles off. The Apostle came, no doubt, only to sympathize. But he found himself in an atmosphere of earnest believing prayer and he recalled the unforgotten scene when his Master restored the daughter of Jairus to life. He lifted up his heart to God, and then, gently and softly, yet knowing that the Holy Spirit was breathing in the words, he said, 'Tabitha, arise!' The closed eyelids look out on life again. She came back to her old work; doubtless, at first, with a little regret. She had been well content 'to depart and be with Christ, which is far better'; but soon the needs and sorrows of Joppa would absorb her loving heart once more.

After all, her true resurrection came later, when her example moved women all over the Church to follow in the path which has brought so much help to the poor and needy in every land.

The healing of the world
Is in its nameless Saints. Each separate star
Seems nothing, but a myriad scattered stars
Break up the night, and make it beautiful.

The Uniting Power of Prayer

Acts x. 9.—'Peter went up upon the housetop to pray.

Of all the evangelists, St Luke takes most pleasure in writing of prayer and in calling attention to men who prayed. He is the only one of the evangelists who tells us that Jesus was praying when He was baptized, that He was praying when He was transfigured, and that He went out of the world praying. He alone presents the parable of the Friend at Midnight, the parable of the Unjust Judge, and that of the Pharisee and the Publican.

1. In this chapter he tells the story of how two men went up, each one upon his own housetop to pray: one was a Roman; the other a Jew. One was a soldier; the other a preacher. One was a servant of Cæsar; the other a servant of Jesus of Nazareth. One was an Asiatic; the other a European. The two men were so far apart that it was impossible for them to come together. Between them yawned a chasm worn deep and wide by centuries of false thinking and perverted feeling.

And yet, in their inner life, the two men were not far apart: both were pious; both recognized the existence of a Sovereign Spiritual Power; both were men of prayer and lovers of mankind; both were charitable. Cornelius had money and gave it; Peter had neither silver nor gold, but such as he had he gave—faith, hope, love, peace, joy. They were both sensitive to God and responsive to man; both went up upon their housetops to pray, and while they prayed something wonderful happened. While Cornelius prayed his prejudices were softened, his sympathies widened, and the thought of Simon Peter came into his

mind. He had often heard of this man and had wanted to hear him, but had never dared to come near him. But now, in his prayer, his courage increased, and a deeper longing took possession of him to hear what this Christian preacher had to say. Accordingly, acting upon the impulse which prayer brought him, he called his servants, and sent them to Joppa with an invitation to Simon Peter to come to Cæsarea—an action springing out of his prayer.

Now what happened in Joppa? Peter went up as was his custom upon the housetop to pray, and while he prayed, his prejudices were softened and his sympathies widened. For a long time he had been trying to reconcile the teachings of Jesus with sundry requirements of the Mosaic law, and strange doubts and scruples had come into his heart which he had not been able to banish. These come up again while he prays. On this particular day he sees more clearly than ever before that the old distinctions have passed away, and, while he is meditating on his new vision, there is a knocking at the door. He meets the messengers of Cornelius, who give him the invitation. He accepts and sets out for Cæsarea. In the house of Cornelius he finds assembled a large company of Romans, to whom he talks about Jesus of Nazareth, and he tells them that he has recently learned something which he has never realized before—that God is no respecter of the exterior of men, and that, no matter who the man is, or what his nationality, if he fears God and does right, God accepts him. While he speaks the same mysterious light and joy fill the hearts of those who listen which had come to the company of Jews in the Upper Chamber on the day of Pentecost, and forthwith Peter gives instructions that they shall all be baptized. That was a great day when Cornelius and Peter met—one of the great days in human history. On that day a mighty chasm was bridged. The miracle was wrought by prayer—by the uniting power of prayer.

Unheard by all but Angel ears
The good Cornelius knelt alone,
Nor dream'd his prayers and tears
Would help a world undone.

The while upon his terraced roof
The loved Apostle to his Lord
In silent thought aloof
For heavenly vision soar'd.

Far o'er the glowing western main
His wistful brow was upward raised,
Where, like an Angel's train,
The burnish'd water blazed.

The saint beside the ocean pray'd,
The soldier in his chosen bower,
Where all his eye survey'd
Seem'd sacred in that hour.

To each unknown his brother's prayer,
Yet brethren true in dearest love
Were they—and now they share
Fraternal joys above.[1]

¶ Among the few precious scraps which Dr Parker kept in his great Bible was a cheque from Father Stanton in aid of one of his City Temple missions. Dr Parker had paid the money and kept the cheque as a precious treasure. When Dr Parker was dying, his mind turned to his friend, and he said, 'Father Stanton is praying for me.' We have no desire to attenuate in any manner the grave and serious differences which separated the school of the one preacher from the school of the other, and yet who that knew them both can fail to say with a joyous confidence that they were one in Christ Jesus? [2]

2. We think of prayer, generally, in its subjective aspects. We know by experience what it does for our own heart. It tranquillizes the feelings, braces the spirit, and dissipates the clouds. But we do not often enough think of it as a social force, a power by which God is building the world.

The outstanding feature of the world at the present hour is its divisions. In every quarter suspicions, antagonisms, and hatreds exist. The social world is divided. On one side are the rich, and on the other the poor; the former are often indifferent to the latter, the latter often bitter and unjust to the former. In the industrial world, labour is arrayed against capital and capital against labour, and the smouldering resentments, again and again, break into flame. The ecclesiastical world is also the scene of strife. The Protestant communions are closer together than they were a generation ago, but they are not yet organized

[1] Keble.
[2] W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Seen and the Unseen*, 112.

into a compact mass of consecrated life which can be used as an instrument in the hands of God for the reformation of the great cities of the land. Between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism there is a great gulf still, and mischief-makers, on both sides, stir up bitterness. In the international realm, we see nations suspicious of one another, still counting their neighbours enemies, and doubtful of disarmament. Poor, torn, distracted, miserable world, full of separating chasms and dividing walls, and no clear prospect of a glorious union!

The present state of humanity is indeed amazing when one remembers that, for nineteen hundred years, Christianity has been proclaiming the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man; that, for three generations, Science has been teaching the solidarity of the race; that Socialism, for many years, has been preaching its doctrine of comradeship and working to knit the nations together. In addition to these mighty preachers, Business, in recent years, has been extolling the virtue of co-operation, and teaching men the secret of efficiency. And yet, in spite of the labours of the Church, the efforts of Socialism, the teachings of Science, and the exhortations of Finance, men refuse to come together, still filling the world with their dissensions and hatreds.

We realize now that we have been misled by two words. The first of these is Progress. For fifty years it has been a goddess, and we have chanted to her hymns of endless praise. We have gloried in our cleverness and exulted in our superiority to the men who lived before us. We now see that material progress is one thing and moral progress another; that the first is worth little without the second. Because the electric light is superior to the tallow dip, the Pullman car better than the stage-coach, and the sewing machine ahead of the old-fashioned needle, we imagined that the world was getting on. But we have discovered that it is possible to advance in physical comfort and not in love, and that, unless the world is advancing in love, it is not advancing at all. Knowledge may come, but if wisdom lingers we are no better off. We are really progressing in life only when we are moving toward the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy.

We have also been misled by Science. So wonderful have been her achievements that men have supposed she could do everything. They have concluded that she, alone, has the words of life, and that all which humanity needs is what Science can tell. Not a few have discarded the old religion of the prophets and apostles, convinced that in Science they had found a religion more adequate for these larger times. But war, with its blazing torch, has shown us the limitations of Science. She is mighty only within narrow limits. All her marvels are wrought inside the kingdom of matter. She can give a man wings and set him flying above the clouds; she can enable him to live at the bottom of the sea; she can give him power to talk to a friend, without a wire, across the ocean; she can unite the Atlantic and the Pacific, but she cannot bring two estranged hearts together. For the knitting of hearts we are as helpless as men were two thousand years ago, and are compelled to do what the apostles did—to fall back on the omnipotence of God.

¶ Dr Burroughs, Bishop of Ripon, put some searching questions and problems to the scientists at the recent annual meetings in Leeds of the British Association in his sermon on that occasion.

'Do we not sometimes seem to have lost our sense of direction, and how many of our sectional explorers stop to ask themselves which way lies the goal,' asked the Bishop. 'Cannot we see how dangerous it is to add further to our heaped-up riches, to the amazing power bestowed upon us by science, unless we are making parallel progress towards a moral and spiritual man and superman?

'Dare we go on enlarging man's body without some sure hope of saving his soul, and, if we want the saving, inspiring, elevating influence of the personality, can it come from anything less or lower than personality itself?

'To-day, as in the time of Job, the cry goes up in a world that is glutted with knowledge of a sort, "Where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding?" And still to the hearing ear the answer comes, "God understands the way thereof, and He knoweth the place thereof."

'As things stand to-day, we can get on without further additions for the present to our knowledge of Nature. We cannot get on without a change of mind in man, and I venture respectfully to urge all those whose eyes are fixed,

with such fruitful consequences, on the particular problems of their special science to turn their gaze also to that other, wider, more urgent problem—the re-making of man. For it is on the solution of this problem that the value, even the rationality, of your own studies depends.'

3. What the world most needs is prayer. We put too much trust in machinery; we rely too much on legislation; we foolishly imagine we can save the world by law. It is not by the might of mechanical forces, or by the power of civil enactments, but by the Spirit of the Eternal that humanity is to be healed. The rich and the poor will never get rid of the thoughts and feelings which push them apart, until they bow down together before the Maker of them all. The great branches of the Christian Church will not be brought together by the diplomatic adjustments of astute ecclesiastics, but the miracle will be wrought by all Christians drawing nearer to God. And how can the nations be so surely and swiftly reconciled to one another as by prayer? Various methods of ending war have been suggested, but the best method has been overlooked by the majority of the wise and the prudent. If the nations would all go up upon their housetops and pray there would be no more talk of war.

It is when we use the higher range of our faculties that we descend into that which is deepest within us. Many of us place great emphasis upon the importance of opinions. We divide men according to their notions, and the men who differ from us in opinion we find it difficult to tolerate and impossible to admire. But opinions are, after all, transitory forms of thought floating on the surface of our life. They change from year to year. They do not represent what is deepest in us. Thomas Carlyle said that he and John Sterling agreed in everything except opinions. Their views were not the same on either politics or religion, but in the ruling purposes of their hearts they were at one. Reason, then, is deeper than opinion. Reason is more constant, and more stable. But reason is not the deepest thing in us. Feeling is deeper, instinct and passion are deeper. Patriotism is a passion, and patriotism is deeper than reason. But patriotism is not the deepest passion within us. Deeper than patriotism is religion. Our relation to God is deeper than our relation to our native land. We all belong to Him and we are all bound to Him, and therefore, sometime, all men will come together. Mankind is one, and when we go up upon the housetop and pray we speak out of the force which is deepest and most controlling within us. We do not pray because we have opinions, or because we are endowed with reason, or because we belong to a certain nation. We pray, solely, because we are men. Man is unconquerably religious, and, being religious, he must pray. He cannot pray in the true spirit of prayer without drawing nearer to his brother. Joppa and Cæsarea are brought together by prayer.

Is it a will-o'-the-wisp, or is dawn breaking,
That our horizon wears so strange a hue?
Is it but one more dream, or are we waking
To find that dreams, at last, are coming true?

Aye, surely, in that golden glimmer streaking
The cloudy sky-line of the life of man,
We see the blessed day he has been seeking
In all directions since the world began.

Sign to each struggling and exhausted nation
Of hope fulfilled, redemption and release;
Sign of the end of needless tribulation,
And the beginning of the reign of Peace.

Country with country, brother with his brother,
Content to share, and not to grab and steal;
Ceasing the wild-beast battle, each with other,
To work in concert for the common weal.

No class-strife more, neighbour with differing neighbour;
No waste or want, to breed the plague of crime;
No soul-debasing pomp and sordid labour,
No wars, no famines, in the coming time!

All round our darksome isle the tide encroaches,
Distant and dim as yet, but spreading fast.
The reign of Love and Liberty approaches!
The heirs are coming to their own at last![1]

[1] Ada Cambridge, *The Hand in the Dark*, 55.

The Perils of Routine

Acts x. 14.—'But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.'

1. The story of Peter's vision is deemed worthy of insertion in this book because it was pregnant with results for the future development of Christianity. Christianity has always had to 'live dangerously.' But the deadliest menace of all threatened it while it was still in its cradle. That menace was that it should never become a universal religion at all, but should degenerate into an obscure Jewish sect. We speak of Paul as the Apostle of the Gentiles and regard him as the great champion of the universality of the gospel—and so indeed he was. But if the Gentile movement had been started by those unknown evangelists who preached to the Greeks at Antioch and then carried on and developed by St Paul—with the Jerusalem Apostles hostile to it because still enchained by their Jewish prejudices—the Church would have been rent in twain from the very start. It was necessary to begin with, therefore, that the Jerusalem Apostles should be converted to the larger vision and the freer faith. It was necessary that they should be emancipated from their narrowing notions and made to realize the largeness of God's purpose and the freeness of Christ's love.

This story tells us how the emancipating process was begun. The vision was given specially to Peter because he was the recognized leader of the Twelve. It is worth noticing that the vision was given before any preaching to Gentiles on the large scale was begun. That tremendous innovation might have evoked opposition and condemnation in Jerusalem had not Peter's mind been prepared by this vision for startling developments of that kind.

2. The universality of the gospel, the equal rights of men in the Kingdom of God are truths surely believed amongst us. What arrests our attention in the text is the reason Peter gives for refusing to kill and eat. 'Not so, Lord, for I have never——' He refused, not because it was wrong, but because he had never done this particular thing before. This is an illustration of the deadening influence of routine, of the crippling and enslaving power of custom.

This protest of Peter represents an attitude in no way peculiar to himself. Men cling to the old. And because they have failed to adapt themselves to changed conditions and new occasions, they have lost their opportunity. That was a favourite saying of Silvester Horne's: 'The difference between a groove and a grave is only a matter of depth.' And many a man and many an institution have found their graves, so far as useful service is concerned, simply because they refused to be lifted out of their grooves. They have met every proposal to adopt new methods with Peter's protest, 'Not so, Lord . . . for we have never.'

¶ There are people who are opposed to any and every departure from established procedure—who seem to be constitutionally unable to support any suggestion which means getting away from the beaten track. And they are to be found in all Churches. An Anglican clergyman has hit them off recently in a telling verse:

> All my fathers have been Churchmen
> Thirteen hundred years or so,
> And to every new proposal
> They have always answered No![1]

Let us illustrate the truth of this in one or two directions.

(1) *The Sphere of Knowledge and Government.*—Men are more afraid of new discoveries of truth than they are of anything else. Every great pioneer in intellectual research has been a persecuted man. All the forces of mental inertia and obscurantism have been in full cry against him. Take, for example, the case of Galileo. What was Galileo's offence? Briefly it was this. He dared to believe that though the Ptolemaic system, which made the earth the centre of the universe, was the popular and orthodox belief, Copernicus was right when he maintained that the sun was the real centre and that our earth revolved round it. He dared to believe it, and he dared to say so. With what result? With the result that though he was an old man of seventy years of age he was flung into prison by the Inquisition, and under threat of torture compelled to recant. It was not that there was anything wicked about Galileo's teaching. It was new; that was all.

Or take the realm of government and administration. What opposition new suggestions

[1] *Methodist Recorder.*

always meet with! They are suspect just because they are new. Why leave old and familiar methods for new and untried ones? There is an interesting illustration of this to be found in the work of Lord Wolseley at the War Office. Wolseley's greatest claim to remembrance is not that he was himself a great and successful soldier, but that he was a great Army reformer. When he entered the service things were as bad as they could be: commissions were bought and sold; promotion was by seniority, not by merit; men had to fight in tropical swamps in tight-fitting scarlet tunics and white buckskin gloves; there was no proper land transport and no adequate provision for the soldier's health. Wolseley, when he got to the War Office, set about trying to alter all that. But next door to him in the same office was the old Duke of Cambridge, the Commander-in-Chief, holding up his hands in horror at the very suggestion that there was anything in our Army or in our military system which was not perfect! 'Not so,' he said to Wolseley's proposals; only he said it more emphatically than that—'for we have never.' Where should we have been in 1914 if the old Duke had had his way? It was because, in spite of opposition and prejudice, the reformers persisted in their task that in the hour of crisis this country could dispatch to France the 'Old Contemptibles.'

¶ There was a time when women worked in our coal-pits because pit-ponies were too expensive, as there was a time, not so long ago, when the agricultural labourer thought himself lucky if he got fourteen shillings a week for working fourteen hours a day, with fourteen pounds of clay sticking to his boots. There was a time when the children of Yorkshire and Lancashire were sent to work in mills long before they are allowed to leave school to-day. The infant mortality was appalling, and on Sunday their elders sang in chapel:

> Around the throne of God in heaven
> Thousands of children stand,
> Children whose sins are all forgiven,
> A holy, happy band.

It was the sins of a society that could allow such a ghastly tragedy as that, that needed forgiving. All these changes were hated and hindered by people who were honestly trying to be good, because they were new and difficult, and meant taking trouble and suffering inconvenience.[1]

> New times demand new measures and new men;
> The world advances, and in time outgrows
> The laws that in our fathers' day were best;
> And, doubtless, after us, some purer scheme
> Will be shaped out by wiser men than we,
> Made wiser by the steady growth of truth.[2]

(2) *The Sphere of the Church.*—What God was doing by this vision of the great sheet was this, He was summoning the Church, through Peter its leader, to a bolder and larger policy. The obstacle in the way was the prejudices of the Christians themselves. They had never thought of the Gentiles as fellow heirs. They had regarded them as outside the pale. When the summons came to offer the gospel to them they said, 'Not so, Lord; we have never.' And how much it cost to overcome that prejudice, and how long it took, anyone may discover who will read the Book of the Acts and the Epistles of St Paul. Ultimately, after the destruction of Jerusalem, that prejudice was destroyed, and what was a dangerous innovation in the hands of St Paul became the regular and accepted practice of the Christian Church. But again and again in the course of the centuries the Christian Church has displayed exactly the same spirit.

In the eighteenth century the Church in its relation to the heathen world occupied much the same position as the primitive Church did to the Gentile world. It felt under no obligation toward it. It neglected and ignored it. The Christian people of a land like this scarcely looked beyond their own borders. Then it was borne in upon the mind and heart of William Carey that those dim and ignorant millions were also God's children, and that Christ had died to save them. He ventured to speak about all this to a ministers' meeting one day, and this was the reply he got from the president: 'Sit down, young man; when God wishes to convert the heathen He will do it without your aid or mine.' Missions to the heathen! Who had ever heard of such a thing? 'Not so,' they said; 'for we have never.'

Or as regards our forms of worship. Their

[1] P. C. Pegler, *Wheat and Some Chaff*, 187.
[2] Lowell.

whole object is to help us to express the love and adoration of our souls. They are not unalterable things like the laws of the Medes and the Persians; they vary, and they ought to vary, in order to give the worshipping spirit free play. Our Puritan fathers, in their revolt against what they believed to be the paganism of Rome, stripped their churches bare. They repudiated all aid of art and beauty. It is doing no dishonour to them to say that they went to the extreme. We have simply crippled ourselves by our rejection of the richness that art can add to our worship. 'Why,' as Luther said, 'should we let the devil have all the good tunes?' And so the younger generation has been asking for a restoration of some of those things our fathers unnecessarily surrendered. They are asking why our churches should not be beautiful. They are asking why we should not have the best of music. They are asking why we should not have some element of stately ritual. But every suggested change meets with the stubborn opposition of some who love what they call the Puritan tradition. 'We have never had that kind of thing in the Church,' they say. And they fail to capture youth because they have allowed themselves to be enslaved by ancient custom.

The Church needs to learn the lesson that no methods are sacrosanct. 'God fulfils Himself in many ways, lest one good custom should corrupt the world.' The methods the Church ought to adopt are not necessarily the methods of our fathers, but the methods best adapted to further the interests of Christ's Kingdom to-day.

(3) *The Sphere of Doctrine.*—'I believe in the Holy Ghost.' We can all heartily say that but we do not all accept what that faith involves. For to believe in the Holy Ghost is to believe in growth in our perception of Christian truth, for the Spirit is constantly talking of the things of Christ and revealing them to men. That this is so is abundantly clear to anyone who studies the history of the Christian Church. Men have grown in their understanding of Christ's mind. And the growing understanding of Christ's mind has necessitated changes in the statement of Christian truth. But there is nothing so distasteful to the average man as to have to change the form of his belief. 'Not so,' we say, 'for we have never.'

¶ The Earl of Balfour has done good service in making plain to Churchmen that religious knowledge is subject to the same change and development as all other knowledge. 'The fact that theological thought follows the laws which govern the evolution of all other thought, that it changes from age to age, largely as regards the relative emphasis given to its various elements, not inconsiderably as regards the substance of those elements themselves, is a fact written legibly across the pages of ecclesiastical history.'[1]

We need to learn the lesson in these days. For once again the Church finds itself in a time of vast and far-reaching change. New discoveries have necessitated new statements of our faith. Our views of the Bible, our ideas as to God's relationship to the world have to be reconstructed. There are some who make the old protest of custom and tradition. If the Church as a whole adopts that attitude, she will inevitably lose all command of the rising generation. The Church's business in this world is to proclaim a gospel—the great and wonderful gospel of the grace of God in the redemption of mankind through the sacrifice of Christ. It is not here to insist upon a certain cosmogony or a certain theory of inspiration. It is here to proclaim the gospel. And what is needed is a Church that shall be ever loyal to that central gospel, but which because it believes in the Holy Ghost will always be frank and open-eyed and hospitable to new truth.

¶ On the following Sunday (October 3rd, 1889) Dr Macewen was introduced as minister at Claremont by Dr Cairns, and in the evening he preached his first sermon on a text which might well be chosen as expressing the supreme loyalties of his own life to kindred, friendship, and the Christian Church. 'For my brethren and companions' sakes I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good.' The main idea of the sermon is that the feebleness of the modern Church is largely due to the fact that modern men and women are during the week living in one world of thought borrowed from the materialistic environment in which they live, while on Sunday they are satisfied to hear familiar doctrines preached which seem to have no living connection with their workaday world. 'It will be my aim to break this

[1] *The Foundations of Belief.*

separating barrier, and so to teach that these truths may be realized as having the closest and most constant bearing on all life. We must face all new light upon the Bible. For myself, my own faith has grown year by year.' 'You yourselves complain that your sons and daughters show no interest in religion or Church work. I do believe that for the alienation of young persons from religion the Church herself largely deserves the blame, and that the true remedy lies not in scolding them, nor in playing upon their emotions and their nerves, but in telling them from week to week the plain truth about the work and words of God.' [1]

Worship and Common Life

Acts x. 15.—'What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.'

St Peter's vision and message took shape from the natural condition of the Apostle at the time. He had been fasting and praying for several hours, and was in consequence worn out with fatigue and faint with hunger. The higher want of his spirit was therefore supplied by the want of his lower nature. Probably, too, the form of the vision—the mould in which it was cast—was determined by the circumstances in which he was placed. He was living in the house of Simon the *tanner*, a man whose occupation was regarded by the stricter Jews as unclean. The Levitical law forbade contact with death in any shape lest defilement should be contracted; but here was a man whose calling exposed him to constant contamination. He prepared the skins of animals—clean and unclean without distinction, we may suppose, if they suited his purpose.

To Peter praying there comes the vision—some waking dream like those by which God's messengers and prophets of truth have been not seldom enlightened, breaking down barriers between races and nations and making all life sacred. 'What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.'

It becomes clear to the Apostle that there is nothing in life common or unclean. This is the very purpose of the gospel, to bring worship into such fusion with what is called common life that we cannot see where one begins and the other ends. This is the very thing that the sacraments of the Church do for us: they carry our ordinary thoughts and habits and characters into contact with the perpetual springs of grace. The meanest acts, as George Herbert knew, may be consecrated by the Cross of Christ and done to the glory of God.

¶ Lowell labours to open the eyes of his readers to the eternal sanctities of love, and to make them share with him in that comprehensive passion of brotherhood to which nothing is common or unclean, nothing in all nature too small to have its Divine meaning and mission.[1]

1. How many of our modern problems would have answered themselves if only such truths as this had been steadily kept in view. We sometimes ask whether a man of confessedly bad character should be excluded from public life. The Greeks, who knew far more about politics than we, would not have understood such a question as that. They saw the obvious fact that between politics and morals no distinction could be drawn. You cannot divide a man into two parts and say that he is political with one side of him and moral with another. His character determines both his political belief and his political action. If a man is proved to be deceitful, selfish, or dishonest in private life, there is every reason to suppose that he will prove the same in public. If we cannot trust him in the smaller sphere how can we trust him in the larger?

If our social and political life is to be sound and healthy, it will only be if those who take part in it are men and women of disinterested views, of personal integrity, purity and honour, and gifted with a deep sense of moral responsibility. If they are to do any good whatever, they must think, not of self-advancement nor of their party, they must think of their country, they must think of God.

But that old distinction of secular and sacred, how fatal it has been to the cause of religion and to the progress of Christianity! No distinction has been more common, none from the Christian standpoint is more radically false. It is rooted in a heresy tolerated by the Church in many centuries, which regarded God not as a Spirit who is everywhere but as a Deity far remote, leaving only an occasional mark of

[1] D. S. Cairns, *Life and Times of A. R. Macewen, D.D.*, 116.

[1] W. H. Hudson, *Lowell and his Poetry*, 47.

His presence on a society which may otherwise ignore or forget Him. So arises the belief that the larger part of life is secular, and if not irreligious at least has nothing to do with religion. Why do we find so many appalling examples of commercial or professional depravity among those who are theoretically Christians? Why are we deliberately told that many Christian men regard the principles of the gospel as no more applicable to business than to chemistry or mathematics, or that the State which tried to base itself on the principles of the Sermon on the Mount would be lost? Is it not very largely because men cling to the weak and narrow and essentially misleading distinction of the sacred and the secular, and call common what God has cleansed?

2. When we speak of 'Divine service' we rightly mean the service of prayer and praise and exhortation in the House of God; but do we also remember the service which Christ taught to be Divine—the feeding of the hungry, the teaching of the ignorant, the performance of duty bravely and cheerfully in the place where God has appointed us to work?

¶ Flying fish live in the sea; that is their nature and habitual realm, but once in a while they make a brief excursion into the upper air and glisten for an instant in the sun only to fall back into the sea again. To how many people is religion such a brief, occasional experience! And yet they call themselves disciples of Him whose heart beat with an intermittent passion to help people, whose God was love, whose worship was daily service, whose hope was the Kingdom, whose instrument was the Cross. They are not really Christians. They are flying fish. For true discipleship to Jesus is the opposite of spasmodic conventionality. We are even wrong when we call our public worship on Sunday 'church service.' Church service really begins on Monday morning at seven o' clock and lasts all the week. Church service is helpfulness to people; public worship is preparation for it. For the church service which the Master illustrated and approved is a life of ministry amid the dust and din of daily business in a sacrificial conflict for a Christian world.[1]

¶ It has been finely said that the room in which Sebastian Bach is sung is transformed thereby into a church. But it is as true—nay, it is more divinely true—that every place where loving deeds are done becomes a temple.

What we want is to make all life sacred. Then we must begin at the foundations of our creed by dethroning that old mechanical and materialistic theory of God. We believe in a God who is never absent, whose presence may be felt in all the ways and all the works of men, who is found in every time and place of His ordered creation. It is He whom we know in the turmoil of the city, in the hopes and tears and struggles of mankind. It is He whom we feel in the remorsefulness of conscience. There is nowhere where He is not. Wherever a mind is thinking or a man is working, wherever a heart is throbbing or a soul aspiring, there is God.

¶ As John Ruskin has taught us: 'The Spirit of God is around us, in the air that we breathe, His glory in the light that we see, and in the fruitfulness of the earth and the joy of its creatures. He has written for us day by day His revelation as He has given us, day by day, our daily bread.'

3. We want to make all life sacred. But life is sacred already if only we had the eye to see and the insight to imagine. We think our own life, perhaps, dull and colourless, a grey routine, an endless monotone. We compare it with some other life in history or fiction or experience which seems to us full of incident and romance. But we are wrong. Any life we may take up, even our own, is like a prism, full of colour, if we look at it from the right angle. And the secret of success is never to let the light of romance fade off our life, but to retain its meaning and dignity and high purpose. 'You call me only a breaker of stones,' said the old roadmender; 'I call myself a maker of the king's highway.' It is, in fact, life itself that is history, it is life itself that is romance. The marvellous gifts of personality, of memory, of foresight, the wonders of sight and sound and touch, the building up of character, the companionship of other lives, birth and death, friendship and marriage, and beyond the shadows of the sunset, the dawning of the eternal day—these things have an inexhaustible significance, and these things belong to us all. It may be, as Sabatier said, that the great majority of men pass through

[1] H. E. Fosdick, *The Meaning of Service*, 13.

life asleep. So they miss the greatness and the glory of it, so they become, in the words of another French writer, candidates for humanity and nothing more. But for us who are intent on following One who declared that He had power to make all things new, let us see to it that we are not drugged and stupified into missing in the familiar the miraculous, in the human the Divine. It is life itself that says to us, 'What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.'

¶ In one of his poems Lowell tells the tale of a prophet who, feeling that God had forsaken him, set out for a certain holy hill in the belief that there if anywhere upon earth His presence still lingered, and on the hillside he prayed for a sign and listened for an answer to his prayer. But there was no burst of thunder, and not even a murmur stirred the air. Only the tuft of moss before him opened, and a tender violet appeared; and at the sight of it he remembered that ere he entered on his journey his child had run to him, holding in her hand a flower just like this, which she had plucked beside his very door. He had no need, therefore, to fare away to a far-off holy hill to see the homely flower, or to seek the Presence whose glory stood over the threshold.[1]

And everywhere, here and always,
If we would but open our eyes,
We should find through these beaten footpaths
Our way into Paradise.
Dull earth would be dull no longer,
The clod would sparkle—a gem;
And our hands, at their commonest labour,
Would be building Jerusalem.

When we look at the daily life of Jesus Christ we see how, in Him, worship and work are blended in one harmonious whole, a life perperfectly consistent with itself, like the sacred garment which He laid aside with life, made of one piece, made without seam, woven from the top throughout. Let us, then, set aside this mean and narrow thought, this idle distinction of the secular and the sacred, and ennoble our commonest tasks, our lowliest duties, with the dignity of the Christian purpose. In that sense we are all priests of God. We can make out of our simplest act an act of worship. Wherever the lines of our lot are fallen we can find life radiant with the sense that God is with us.

What though the common lot of toil be thine,
Thy task the meanest drudgery under heaven,
Thou may'st transform and make it all divine,
If love thy labour leaven.

Work is the daily worship of thy hands,
The service thou dost render to mankind
Must be the measure of thy worth; it stands
The index of thy mind.[1]

God with us—is not that the very message of the gospel? Is not that the point at which all life is taken up into the meaning of the Incarnation? St John, that other seer of visions, following in the steps of his Master, and brooding on the great truth of the Word made flesh, so that nothing any more in humanity is common or unclean, looks forward to a city without a temple, full of the realized presence of God. 'I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.' That, by the mercy of God, is made possible for us, prayer and service with their golden threads drawing us onward to the city without a temple and yet with perpetual worship, where are those who look upon the face of Jesus and see Him as He is.

[1] J. R. Cameron, in *The Expositor*, October, 1925.

Doing Good

Acts x. 38.—'Jesus of Nazareth . . . who went about doing good.'

PERHAPS that on the whole is the best summary of our Lord's earthly ministry: He went about doing good. That is historically true. In those three years of His public ministry He was so busy that sometimes He had no time to take His food. Those pictures of Jesus which are most in vogue, which depict Him as having a beautiful, smooth, unwrinkled face, are probably not true. We have no picture of Jesus at all, just as we have no word that He ever wrote. But some great artists have almost fixed in our imagination the type of countenance which we now associate with Jesus: the central face of the 'Last Supper' in Milan, for example, or Rembrandt's Jesus

[1] David Lawton.

in the hundred guilder print, 'Healing the Sick,' or Hoffmann's 'Jesus in the Temple,' that exquisite girlish face. But we have no authentic face of Jesus, and probably all artists err in giving to our Lord a countenance too smooth and untroubled.

Our Lord's countenance must indeed have borne the marks of anguish and care. For, as a man of genius said almost two hundred years ago, 'When Christ was only thirty-two, those who saw Him took Him to be a man of fifty!' 'Thou art not yet fifty!'—so much had life taken out of Him.

No great work is ever done easily. There were mysterious conditions necessary before our Lord could do anything. There were places where, we read, He could do no work because of something wanting in the circumstances, wanting in the heart of the man for whom He was ready to do the great work. What Jesus did wore Him out, so that again and again He retired to a mountain apart, there to lay open His soul to the energy of God.

1. '*He went about* doing good.' He looked about to see where good might be done. There are many devout people who, hating the wickedness of this world, have withdrawn to some lonely spot with the determination to spend their lives there, solitary and alone. In the world their brothers may be struggling and fighting, but they heed them not, and yet they say that their lives are an imitation of Christ—of Him who 'went about doing good.' The disciples of Jesus are only leaven, important in the lump, but no use outside it.

¶ The Sadhu has been asked what he thinks about men who leave the world and live alone in prayer and meditation, seeking to save their own souls, rather than being on active service in the world for their fellow-men. This is what he says: 'During the few years of this life only I am given the privilege to serve man and Christ. If it were right for me to be in Heaven always I should have been called there, but as I am still left on earth it is my duty to work. The world is all the property of my Father, and is, therefore, my property. If I give up the world, I give up some of the gifts which my heavenly Father gives me out of His love. Therefore, I do not give up the world, but only the evil in it.' [1]

[1] Sundar Singh, 59.

Opposed to these ascetics are the strict Protestants who spend six days bartering and selling, and on the seventh make their way to church to pay their duty to God. They are comfortable, and listen with satisfaction to the words of the preacher. They *sit still*, feeling good.

2. Our Lord went about doing good *by what He said.* It must have been a great thing to hear Christ's voice. There is nothing so betraying in the region of character as the voice. A great grief will lower the pitch of the voice one full tone, whereas a few weeks' trivial successes, if you allow your mind to dwell on them, will ruin the finest voice.

'Never man spake like this man.' He told them about God. He told them that this world is not the only home, that in His Father's house there are many mansions, and as God was His father, so He was like a father or elder brother to all other men. But the lessons which He taught were often in contradiction to the received opinions of men. Consider how He said, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath'; or, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'; or, 'Father, forgive them'; or, 'Blessed are the poor.' And there are, as we well know, words of our Lord which we hardly venture to repeat, because they are so much at variance with the practice of Christians that we, perhaps weakly, fear lest they should endanger existing institutions. But this side of the teaching of Christ is not the whole or the principal part of it. The greater message, which He came into the world to declare, was the message of love, the love of God to man. He told men that their Father who was in Heaven was more ready to hear than they were to ask; that He did not need to be told of them, although they needed to be told of Him; that the least things were the objects of His care equally with the greatest; that He never cast out any that came; only they could not be the friends of God and hate their brethren; they could not worship God in spirit and in truth when they sought to be observed of men; they could not see God when their minds were darkened with impurity and sin. But let them once break through the hardness of heart which divided them from God, let them receive the word of Christ, and they too like Him would become the sons of God. They must forgive if they would be forgiven;

they must do as they would be done by; they must give and it should be given to them; they must be holy, for God was holy. This is the message of Christ, the good news, not to them only but to all mankind.

I wish that Christ were here among us still,
Proffering His bosom to His servant's brow;
But Oh! that holy voice comes o'er us now
Like twilight echoes from a distant hill:

We long for His pure looks and words sublime;
His lowly-lofty innocence and grace;
The talk sweet-toned, and blessing all the time;
The mountain sermon and the ruthful gaze;
The cheerly credence gather'd from His face;
His voice in village-groups at eve or prime! [1]

3. Our Lord went about *doing* good. It has been said that our Lord was the first Social Reformer. If by social reform be meant the doing away with all the inequalities between classes, or even the removal from human life of the permanent cause of a great deal of physical suffering, it cannot be said that this description of Him is accurate. But if our Lord was not, in the restricted modern sense, the first social reformer, He was undoubtedly, in the true and ample sense of the word, the first philanthropist. He loved man as man, He loved not one part but the whole of man. The Evangelists tell us of His great miracles of healing. They tell us also how He went about, not only healing the sick, and cleansing the lepers, and opening the eyes of the blind; but everywhere pacifying enemies also, and reconciling offended friends, and making crooked things straight; softening and sweetening and healing the hearts and the homes of all men wherever He went. At every table at which He sat all men saw a never-to-be-forgotten example of temperance in eating and drinking and talking, together with an approachableness and a brotherly love never to be forgotten. He never left any house without leaving a long-remembered blessing behind Him. He alone could truly say what Homer puts far too easily into his hero's mouth: 'I wrought no froward deed, said no rude word.' He went about the fields and lanes of Galilee and later trod the streets of Jerusalem radiating kindness. We see in Him all the kindness of human fellowship of which we more immediately think when we speak of a life spent in doing good. He was never too busy to be kind. You remember the occasion when a number of mothers drawn to Christ by His wonderful sermons brought their children to Him desiring His blessing on the heads of their little ones. The disciples thought it was troubling Him unnecessarily. But Jesus turned to the mothers who were going away disappointed, and said to them, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.' Nor was He ever too tired to be kind. The woman at the well of Sychar found Him very tired, but His weariness was thrown aside to enter with sympathy into the trouble of her life. And to the good and the bad He was alike kind. There is nothing in all history so completely kind as His conduct toward the sinful woman who was brought to Him by the men who were ready to stone her to death. We see so clearly that angry self-righteous crowd and the pitying face of the Christ as He says, 'Neither do I condemn thee.'

¶ In the middle of the third century the Roman empire was afflicted by a pestilence which, according to the historian Gibbon, destroyed not less than half the population. It broke out at Carthage while Cyprian was still alive. There was a general panic, all the heathen that could do so fled. Cyprian summoned the Christians to aid him in doing all that could be done. Some of them were anxious to confine their aid to their fellow-believers, their feelings against the heathen had been irritated by a recent persecution, and they knew that another persecution was impending, but they received no countenance from their bishop. 'If,' exclaimed Cyprian, in a sermon preached at this crisis, 'if we only do good to those who do good to us, what do we more than the heathen and the publicans? If we are the children of God, who makes His sun to shine upon the good and the bad, and sends His rain on the just and on the unjust, let us now prove it by our own acts, let us bless those who curse us.' [1]

Happily this spirit of Christ has breathed in His followers. There are folks who are the victims of foully crooked conditions, there are horrible twists in the constitution of society in the folds of which lives are pinched and

[1] C. T. Turner.

[1] Canon Liddon.

crushed and broken. There are terrible cries arising to God's heaven! And to go about doing good is much more than to give money here or to bestow a smile there, or even to proclaim the evangel of a prospective heaven.

There are a few great souls who see with superhuman clearness what the world needs. John Howard reformed the prisons. Wilberforce suppressed the slave trade. Lord Shaftesbury gave his strength to legislation on behalf of factory children, and George Cadbury showed what one man could do in solving the housing problem and improving conditions of labour.

We, too, are to go abroad redressing human wrongs. God needs men and women to be the living witnesses of His work. To those who have no opportunity of these greater ministries there are the common needs lying at our gate. And among these needs are food, and gentle nursing, and kindly comforts. And for this the Lord has need of us.

¶ Mrs Browning tells this incident in *Aurora Leigh*. Lucy Gresham, the poor seamstress, lay dying in an attic. Marian Erle, also a poor seamstress, was in the workroom with the other girls when she heard the news. Laying down her work at once, she hastened away to the sufferer that she might be God's minister in the hour of need. '"Why, God," thought Marian, "has a missing hand this moment; Lucy wants a drink, perhaps. Let others miss me! Never miss me, God."'

The Good Physician

Acts x. 38.—'Who went about doing good, and healing.'

THERE are many beautiful titles which at various times have been ascribed to Jesus Christ, but there is none, perhaps, more beautiful and more appropriate than that of 'The Good Physician.' Our Lord's life was an epic of healing. Wherever He went He radiated health. The sick bodies were made sound, the feeble souls grew strong, the doors of God were opened to the spirits about to perish. Such was the historic manner of the epiphany of Christ, of His manifestation to His own contemporaries. 'He went about,' records the first Evangelist, 'preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing.' 'Who went about doing good and healing,' says St Peter.

¶ 'God had an only Son, and He was a Missionary and a Physician' wrote David Livingstone from Africa to his brother in Scotland.

1. Now when the gospel of the Good Physician went out into the Roman world, that world in a curious way had been made ready to receive it. For in the age of the Cæsars the people were much taken up with the question of healing. They felt that they were ill; ill in body, ill in soul; and they longed to be made well. So there took place about this time a great revival of the cult of Æsculapius, the pagan god of healing. In their physical and spiritual infirmities men prayed to him as one who was 'most loving toward men,' as 'God the Saviour.' There is a passage in the Epistle to Titus which speaks of 'the kindness of God our saviour and his love toward men.' The phraseology is interesting, since the title 'God the Saviour' was the familiar name for the healer Æsculapius, while the adjective of the noun translated 'love toward men' was the peculiar, standing epithet of that heathen deity.

Into this sick Roman world, then, with its terrible sense of disorder and its feverish quest for health, Christianity made its way. It presented itself deliberately as the religion of recovery, as the means, the sole genuine means, of sanity and salvation. It offered the sick world health. The Church was declared the hospital of invalid humanity; and in the wards of the great infirmary, attending on the patients, the faith of the early Christians saw a Good Physician—no quack doctor like Æsculapius, but a true Physician—imparting new life, new joy, new hope, to body and mind alike new energy and power.

¶ 'There is but one Physician,' St Ignatius cries, 'Jesus Christ our Lord.' 'The Word of the Father,' says Clement of Alexandria, 'is the only Pæonian Physician for human infirmities and the Holy Charmer for the sick soul.'

2. Let us look now to the present. Let us see, if we can, in what manner Jesus Christ is already, or may become, the Good Physician of the suffering men and women of our day.

Our Lord, you will notice, was in the habit of healing not only the souls, but also the bodies of men. The Apostles, again, in the Spirit of the Lord, healed not only the souls but also the

bodies of men. And both our Lord and His Apostles very evidently anticipated that physical healing would be one of the results of the working of Christ's Spirit in the Christian Church. Nor even now, among the children of that Church, has the belief in Christ's action on men's bodies quite died out. When the Eucharist is administered the formula is said, 'The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ that was given for thee, preserve thy body'—thy body—'and soul unto everlasting life.' And after all is not the doctrine that the Good Physician cures even physical diseases intrinsically reasonable? We all recognize that the mind does enormously affect the body, that mental conditions profoundly influence physical health. Let the mind of a man be strengthened, let his spirit be quickened and vitalised, let the invisible principle of his being be renewed, and a modification of his bodily state is bound to follow. But if this be so, what power can give such vigour to the inward central life as the power of our religion? It is right, without doubt, to pay homage to the science and skill of our doctors; but it is simple folly not to reckon with the truth that there is in recovery a spiritual as well as a material factor, and that no one so effectively as Jesus Christ can set in motion this curative force.

¶ One hot night at sea I was sitting out on deck when a dear old man joined me and began to talk of politics, social reform, and religion. After a time we spoke of Jesus, and I remarked that a man had written a book to prove that He was a myth—a fictitious and legendary figure. 'A myth!' exclaimed my companion. 'So they call Him that, do they? Well, then, a myth saved me from suicide.' With a little encouragement, he told me the story. Overwork and a nervous breakdown had led to insomnia. He consulted specialist after specialist, spent weary days in health resorts and nursing homes, and still endured awful, endless nights of dreary sleeplessness. 'Every night,' he said, 'I went to bed worn out, worried, and wakeful. A dozen times I would get up, turn on the light, walk about, go back to bed—but all in vain. I had been going on like this for nearly a year. I had tried everything, but still I could not sleep. I was unable to read or work, and life was becoming an intolerable burden. I felt sometimes that reason was tottering, and, to my horror, I had begun to think of suicide. One night, when I was desperate, I began to pray. I told Jesus I had heard that He helped men when they were at their last gasp, and I was pretty nearly finished. I told Him the whole story—all I had gone through. I told Him I could not stand it much longer, and I begged Him to come to my help. Then I turned over and slept peacefully for three hours. Since then, I have prayed every night, and every night I sleep—good refreshing sleep for five or six hours. I just tell Jesus all about my worries and turn them over to Him.' 'Did you tell your doctors?' I asked. 'I told the best two of the bunch, and they both said there was nothing abnormal or mysterious about my experience. It was what they would expect. One of them, a great nerve specialist, declared that if all his patients would pray every night when they went to bed he would be a poorer man, for he would hear very little more from the victims of insomnia.'[1]

But the healing of the body, after all, is secondary. Our chief and most pressing interest is the restoration of the soul. Here is the sphere in which the whole process of healing must of necessity begin. 'Humanity up to this day,' writes Maeterlinck, 'has been like an invalid tossing and turning on his couch in search of repose.' We are conscious in our nature of a radical disorder. Our sunshine is flecked with shadow. Maxim Gorky, speaking of the histories of his Russian outcasts, writes: 'Each story was unfolded before us like a piece of lace in which black threads predominated.' And the description might, perhaps, not unfairly be applied to all the story of the modern spirit. Can we really deny, then, that the soul of us is sick? Surely the old lament of such a one as St Bruno has not lost its force. 'It is not merely the weaker part of my nature which fails me,' he cries. 'It is the very strongest. My understanding, will, and firmness, my spiritual might, all that is or may be virtue, is by my sin enfeebled.'

But for us, as for the men of old, the Good Physician waits. For us, as for them, is the healing power of God put forth in Jesus Christ. Let us never forget that God wills us to be well. His purpose for us is perfection and life; His work is salvation. 'This,' says Clement of Alexandria, 'is the greatest and most royal work of God, the saving of mankind.'

[1] F. A. Atkins, *Who Laughs Last?* 150.

And this omnipotent Will to heal is not a mere vague, diffused, unordered force, elusive and intangible. It takes effect through a Person. It makes itself felt in Christ. Here is the living channel of the Father's saving life. Through Christ pours in that endless stream of health, that flood of immortality, that abolishes the sicknesses and weaknesses of the soul, and works again and again the amazing miracle of repair. The Son of God is the Love of God come near us for quickening action, and in Him—and in Him alone—we know the benefits of that Power 'who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.'

3. To each of us Christ offers such spiritual health. But let us not forget that to this, as to all His blessings, a condition is attached. 'God,' declares St Augustine, 'who made thee without thy help, will not save thee without thy help.' Wholeness and happiness, sanity and salvation—they are indeed the Good Physician's gifts, but they are granted to those alone who will appropriate them from within. And so we learn once more the time-honoured lesson of surrender—the duty of submitting to the heavenly Doctor's treatment, of accepting His remedies, of following His regimen, of obeying His discipline.

Yet there is something more even than this. For it is not merely passive surrender in a patient but active co-operation that is needed for a cure. We should seek for health deliberately. We should seek it with science and method. We should seek it at all times and in all directions. In the church and in the chamber, in the study of the Scriptures, in 'the expectant silences of prayer,' in the companionship of noble books and saintly men, we should watch for the passing of the Good Physician, that we may reach out and touch the hem of His garment and be healed. And not least important is the systematic exercise of mental concentration. Set aside each day some little portion of your time and try to realize with all the faculties of your being the Power and Presence of the healing Christ. Bar out for a while all thoughts of worldly things, and vitally concentrate your whole attention on the Saviour. You will find that the practice is very fruitful of results. You may start with small beginnings—ten minutes of recollection in the morning and as many in the evening, is the advice of the French archbishop. But to those who persevere a time will come when at any and every moment they are able to retire into an inner sanctuary of silence, and refresh their wearied souls at the Fountain of Life Eternal.

¶ 'As often as you can in the course of the day, recall your spirit into the presence of God,' writes St Francis of Sales in his meditations on the Devout Life. In the noise and confusion of the visible, one needs constantly to take refuge in the invisible. We are always in the presence of God; to find that presence we do not need to seek the silence of the desert or the monastery; we need only to remember that we are in His presence, and to recall our spirits to the consciousness that wherever we are, there is God also. To give his deep counsel greater definiteness, the great Bishop of Geneva adds these striking words: 'Remember, then, to make occasional retreat into the solitudes of your heart, whilst outwardly engaged in business or conversation. This mental solitude cannot be prevented by the multitude of those who are about you, for they are not about your heart, but about your body; so your heart may remain above, in the presence of God alone.' [1]

Christians

Acts xi. 26.—'And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.'

It is interesting to know that at Antioch the name 'Christians' was first applied to the disciples of Jesus; and as we reflect that as a matter of fact the name is now known all over the earth, and is destined either to perish or to become as universal as the name of man itself, we cannot but be touched when we recall that at a certain place and at a given time the name first emerged.

Now, there are some things which are worth pondering in this innocent-looking piece of information.

1. *It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.* Antioch was the third city of the Roman Empire—that is to say, it was in a great bustling city, right in the midst

[1] H. W. Mabie, *The Life of the Spirit*, 138.

of the current life of the time, that the disciples of Jesus were first known for what they were. There is something in us which we must resist which suggests to us that we Christians had better retire from the world. To the voice which, coming to us sometimes from outsiders, coming sometimes from the region of our own indolence or our pride, would have us withdraw from the tumult and harshness of the actual world, we must stop our ears and plunge the more heartily into the good fight. We must repel the suggestion, which is nothing but a temptation, that Christianity is something too fine for this workaday world, something so delicate and fragile that it must never hear an angry word, or come within sight of the wildness and wickedness of human beings. For that is not Christianity which cannot stand up to anything. Jesus, we read, touched a leper —a leper whom other people shunned. That is not merely a fact, it is the disclosure of a principle—it is a rebuke and a summons.

In the midst of many things which we must deplore in the habits and tendencies of our time there is one thing in which we may rejoice. It is steadily coming home to people that Christianity is something which you must take seriously. You must either accept it or resist it. That it is out for—everything. We have all of us abandoned the superstitious attitude to Christianity, the idea that by a certain show in public, and by our assent to certain abstract propositions—for example as to the nature of God, and as to the relation between God and Christ—we secure ourselves against the proper consequences in another world of our behaviour in this. In fact, we are all beginning to see that Christianity is goodness, and goodness of a very definite and obvious kind. We are beginning to see also that Christianity is separated by its whole magnitude from all those natural and desperate reactions against the plain reading of life such as you have in Hindu contemplation or in any Western affectation of Oriental curiosity.

¶ In the summer of 1914 Mr Archibald first came to lecture at St Andrews. His lectures had always a wonderful quality of freshness, like a breath of the wind of heaven blowing through the room. Christianity was so practical, so tremendously worth while. It was so interesting—here was the key to the puzzles of the universe, here were the treasures of knowledge: you could open the door and go on and on, finding still more and more of that which you sought. 'If St Paul,' he once said, 'had wings, he had also boots, good strong ones,' so while our minds were lifted to the heavenlies, our feet were kept on the firm ground of everyday life. Christianity was life. Christianity was a whole life, every bit of it came in, and every bit belonged to God. Here was the secret of light, and love, and joy, and peace.[1]

Far from agreeing with the phrase that Christianity, for example, has nothing to do with the more robust and hearty forms of human interest—with men's pleasures and their ambitions and their politics—we reply, erring perhaps a little on the other side, that Christianity has to do with almost nothing else but these things. If pressed for proof, we quote the New Testament everywhere, culminating on the one hand in the Sermon on the Mount and on the other in the political chicanery which crucified our Lord. Or further back, and to show the depth of the Christian root, we quote almost anywhere in the Law and the Prophets, from Amos on the worship of the senses to Isaiah's fulminations against the smart men of his day who had made a corner in wheat.

¶ 'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.'[2]

2. *It was not the disciples of Jesus who gave themselves this new name.* We learn that it was other people—outsiders, people who had their eye upon them—who called them Christians. The point is that in those first fresh days the Early Church did not give itself a name: it was the world which gave it a name. Probably the good people who formed the Church at the very beginning were so busy being what they were that it never occurred to them to stop and tell people what they were trying to be. And so they devoted all their freshness and energy to being and doing things, instead of losing breath announcing what they were proposing to be and to do. Contrast this sincere and hearty method with what is so common amongst ourselves. We, after many meetings, arrive at some name by which we shall designate our-

[1] *Malcolm Archibald: A Memoir*, 25. [2] Milton.

selves and announce our arrival in the world. The expense of spirit involved in this, although we may not be aware of it, has nearly exhausted us. And then there are some people whom you cannot hinder from supposing that, having given themselves a name or having publicly adhered to a society with a certain name, they have done something; whereas, of course, so far they have done nothing. Or we announce that we are about to launch out upon some good and special work; and by so doing we simply make any high consequence impossible from the outset. We warn the enemy that we are proposing to begin an attack upon him on a certain date and to develop our attack in a certain way; and so when we come to real grips we find him with his own diabolical resources massed ready for the shock. But apart from these subtleties, the one thing we ought to take to heart from this piece of casual information that 'the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch' is surely just this: that there ought already to be something about us who confess Christ, of such a kind, of such force and point, that people outside our community shall be compelled to admit that it is there and to give it a name.

¶ Christianity has no future, and it deserves none unless there be manifestly within those who bear its name a certain sweetness and unworldliness and charm which, without a word, annoys and assails and invites and condemns and sings and makes intercession for the sins of the world.

As the innocent moon, that nothing does but shine,
Moves all the labouring surges of the world.[1]

In this very Book of the Acts there is a story of the sons of one Sceva, a Jew, who tried to personate Jesus. They were strolling exorcists, who in those old days attended fairs and markets, working wonders, and making a livelihood. Not content, however, with their own tricks, they pretended that they were in league with the Jesus whom Paul preached, and began to use the Holy Name. But we read that on one occasion an evil spirit whom they were trying to exorcise, and who must have had a touch of humour in his diabolism, replied to their incantations scornfully: 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?' whereupon he leapt upon those pretenders and so belaboured them that they were glad to get away wounded and naked!

So we see that the Early Church laid no stress upon its name, and did not exhaust itself in drawing up a constitution and in announcing a programme. It lived out its life; and the evil spirits in the world of that day recognized that their reign was over.

3. *The outside world called the early disciples 'Christians.'* Why was it *Christ* and not *Jesus* that men of the world heard upon their lips? If the very essence of the primitive gospel was that men should follow Jesus, should imitate Jesus, should admire and love the Jesus who lived and spake and suffered and died as the Gospels describe—if that were ever the heart of Christianity, why were the early disciples not known to the world as the 'Jesus-people,' instead of as the 'Christ-people'? The answer is simply this, that the first love of Jesus was not personal but theological; it was the happy abandonment of tender souls to *God* in a new relationship which Jesus as the Christ had established. The men of Antioch had no prejudices in the matter; and what they made out with regard to those people who had come amongst them was that their great word was Christ. The thing they celebrated was not that Jesus had said this or that beautiful thing, or had acted with this or that display of tenderness. The thing they celebrated was that God had sent the long-promised Messiah, and that when He came behold it was Jesus! That therefore *they* were right who, reading deeply the literature of their faith—their Isaiah and Jeremiah, and Job, and Jonah—had been looking to God for some public sign that it was a kind and thoughtful and understanding heart which through all eternity had been beating there behind the veil. The first transport of the Church was not over the thought of what, in the light of Jesus, a *man* might be; but over the thought of what, in the light of Jesus, *God* was and is for evermore! It can never have been a mere accident that the Early Church spoke of Christ rather than of Jesus, of God's relation to us rather than of our relation to Him and to one another.

Let us try to make this clear and in some such way as this. We may study the life of

[1] J. A. Hutton, *The Dark Mile*, 116.

Jesus, His words and acts, until the breath of His Spirit mingles with and masters our own, lifting us through the stages of rebuke and admiration and something like fondness to such adoration and reverence as we would offer to God. But there is certainly another way. Setting out upon this other way a man begins in a sense with himself, and yet not strictly speaking with himself. He begins with himself in some confessed relation to Another, to One All-good, All-wise, All-great. He begins with himself, a sinful man face to face with a Holy Law which is justly binding on Him. Or he begins with himself in his physical and intellectual weakness face to face with a world of inevitable nature, mountains, oceans, clouds, disease and death, and all the strivings of human beings with one another. He begins with all that; and from the despair of it all, and his own futility in view of it all, he lifts up his eyes if haply they may rest on a God who understands, and who, if He understands, must all the time be dealing with the human problem. And the great new-birth of the human race was on that day, and in solitary souls it is repeated, when men saw, not so much Jesus in God—a light upon the human problem—but God in Jesus, Jesus as the Christ of God, the end of all our problems. For that is no longer a problem which God shares.

The Church at Antioch

Acts xi. 26.—'And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.'

'The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.' This unveils to us a great city and a little company of believing men and women, who are like living salt in the midst of all its corruptions. No record preserves the names of its founders, and yet it was a Church of amazing vigour. There was no Church in all the apostolic life that could compare with it in the blaze and fervour of its ministry, and while Jerusalem loitered, or had become altogether negative and repressive, Antioch was going ahead. It became the centre of Christian propaganda. We may say that the Church of Christ was born again in Antioch, which became the cradle of Gentile Christianity; and she became the first great missionary Church, pulsing with life, filled with grace.

Well, had she any secrets that were peculiarly her own? How did she become so great, so vital, so contagious, so mighty, and so fertile?

1. The first glimpse we get is through the eyes of Barnabas, who says that when he came and looked on them he saw *the grace of God.* He had come in from the meretricious adornments of the city and he gazed upon the beauty of the Lord. As he came through the city he saw sin abounding; when he came into the little Church he found grace abounding, and Barnabas said to himself and to those around him, 'It is the grace of the Lord Jesus.' He could make no mistake about it. He said: 'Their lives are illumined. They carry the seal of the Spirit. His grace is revealed in their redeemed lives, and it is unlike anything and everything else in all the city of Antioch.' He saw grace. What is grace? We cannot define it; but then we cannot define anything that is really mystical and eternal. We cannot define anything that is really lovely, still less can we define love itself. We cannot define a garden, we cannot describe it.

¶ Jowett says, 'When I was at Coniston, just after Ruskin's death, I went into a little private exhibition where some of his work was being revealed, and I remember standing for long before what was to me an extraordinarily exquisite bit of work by Ruskin himself. The grace of it surpasses any words of mine to describe. It was only a twig, a sketch of a twig of a pine growing on the slope of Coniston Old Man.'

Grace is just as multitudinous as the things of a garden. Let us try to get beneath all these multitudinous expressions to the common energy by which they are all fed and sustained. When we turn to the New Testament we find words like these, 'Be strengthened in the grace that is in Jesus Christ.' That is the making of an athlete. Grace is there the secret of vigour. Then we turn over the page and we find a phrase like this, 'We have good hope through grace,' where grace confers the endowment of a forward-looking mind. And there grace is the secret of vision. But then we turn over the page again and find a phrase like this, 'Singing with grace in your hearts,' where grace seems to have to do with buoyancy and spring and exhilarance of spirit, where grace seems to be the secret of song.

Barnabas saw all this. Would he make the same remark to-day if he were here? Whatever the critics of the Church may say, are they compelled to say, 'They are different'? And even if they do not call the difference the grace of God, are they compelled, by imperious and most blessed necessity, to admit the contrast and to say there is something there that separates their life from ours? Is the Church of Christ like a city set on a hill, with all its lamps blazing by night, a city that cannot be hid?

2. In the description that is given us of the Church in Antioch it is confined entirely within about a dozen verses—the veil is lifted several times, just as if some mystic hand drew aside the curtain and we were allowed to see right into the inner life of this beautiful little Church. Twice when the veil is lifted, and we look into their church life, we see the members *praying and fasting*. Fasting—the discipline of the body; praying—the discipline of the spirit. They practised both; not one without the other. They recognized the amazing intimacy of spirit and flesh, of soul and body. And so they fasted, because they believed that a pampered body meant a burdened spirit. They fasted because they knew that sometimes their spirit would have flown but that the heavy rider kept it down, and they said, 'The flesh shall not be in the saddle.' And so these men in this early day said, 'The body shall be subdued'; and one man, the greatest of them all, said, 'I keep my body under.' It is not a despised body, but he subdued and chastened it in order that it might be a refined ministry in the hands of the Lord. Think of that little company away there in Antioch, amid all the extravagance and gluttony and wastefulness and ease of Antioch, and saying, 'We will keep our bodies under and we will make our bodies serve the King.'

¶ 'Pride, fullness of bread, and prosperous ease,' these deaden the spirit; they make the ears deaf too, and the hands unready for the needs of the world and the claims of God. Be on your guard. What is ailing with many of us is that we are too fatally comfortable. It is sucking out the better life of us. 'How could I fail to win?' said Frederick the Great, after the battle of Rosbach. 'Soubise had seven cooks and one spy; I had seven spies and one cook.' The remark has a wide application. Watch the proportion of things. Life is a battle which has a way of hanging on to the proportions a man preserves between the commissariat and the intelligence departments; between his cooks and his sentries.[1]

And with fasting there went praying, ceaseless commerce and communion with the King. It does not refer merely to spasmodic acts. Indeed, are we ever learning to pray until prayer is less an act and more an attitude? Prayer is not so much the lifting up of the hands periodically in intercessory prayer and supplication; it is a certain exposure of the soul, it is a certain openness, a certain spiritual receptiveness.

¶ I fell into a habit years ago of talking with God, and it became so natural, that in all my open spaces I do it without thought. I talk myself often to sleep at night, and open the morning talking, as it were. It is not supplication or ejaculation or adoration, but a friendly way of contemplation and personal intercourse. In one view, it is not prayer; but I so much love it as to sometimes let it take the place of prayer when it should not.[2]

Our Lord said, 'This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting'—those particular means of grace endow the spirit with a power of expulsion and compulsion by which they can do the blessed work of the Lord. Has the Church of Christ got that power in it to-day? Dare we speak to things and say, Come out? Will they come? Well, this little Church had it. They fasted and they prayed, and they had tremendous powers of moral and spiritual expulsion.

3. What is the next sign of spiritual wealth that we see? A rumour came to Antioch that there was dearth in Judea, and how did this little Church act that was disciplined in soul and body? Every one *determined to send relief*. Just think of sending relief to the people who had sent their delegate to spy out their faith and see if they were really genuine Christians! But there was an element of refinement even in their benevolence, as there is always a plus in the ministry of grace. When they determined to send relief they said, We will send it by Saul and Barnabas—the best men we have got. Grace always runs over; it adds refinement to beneficence.

[1] T. Yates, *Sculptors of Life*, 108.
[2] *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, 524.

It is one thing to hear a cry for bread, it is one thing to hear when there is dearth and famine and a call for food. But this little Church had something deeper than that. It was so fine, so sensitive that it could hear a cry for spiritual food. And this is the crown of all—the loftily fruitful point of their consecrated life. 'And the Holy Spirit said unto them, Separate me Saul and Barnabas for the work to which I have called them.' They might have said, 'To take Saul and Barnabas away just now, when the work is scarcely established—for they have only been here twelve months—will throw everything into confusion and ruin. Why, if you take them away the new organization will be like a building without mortar: what other place so needy as Antioch? And what a strategical centre! Men gather here in Antioch from the ends of the earth. We cannot spare them. And how foolish to impoverish the home base for the sake of the foreign field.'

¶ 'It happened in Tokio,' said Drummond, 'that I had the privilege of addressing some thirty or forty Christian Japanese pastors, and at the close I asked them if they had any message they would like me to take home to the churches here from Japan. And they appointed a spokesman, who stood up and told me in their name what they would like me to say. They told me two things—it is the first thing I want now to name. The first thing they told me was this: "Tell them to send us one six thousand dollar missionary"—I know it is rather American, but never mind—"rather than ten two thousand dollar missionaries."'

If we are spiritually disciplined in body and soul, and if we have fine nerves like fine wireless that can catch an S.O.S. from the ends of the earth, and if when we hear the S.O.S. we are willing to send our best, then God will crown the issue, and our lines will go out to the ends of the earth.

The Unexpected Deliverance

Acts xii. 5.—'Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.'

This is one of the most vivid and touching narratives in the New Testament. Here we have a reference to the first serious persecution with which the infant Church of Christ was visited in the land of its birth. No great effort had been made to put an end to the Christian propaganda, the rulers of the Jews naturally supposing that with the crucifixion of Jesus all danger from His teaching was over. When, to their astonishment, they found that it continued, and that extraordinary things were taking place wherever the new gospel was preached, they became alarmed. So matters went on for a while, till at length the heresy—for such they judged it to be—assumed formidable proportions. Then Stephen was put to death and severe measures were enacted against the Judæan Christians in general. This was followed up some time later by the action of King Herod Agrippa, who determined to root out the Christian community. He struck at the leaders, killing James, the brother of John—no doubt a zealous and prominent preacher—and arrested Peter and flung him into prison. There was not much human probability that the Apostle would ever come out of that prison alive.

The king was only waiting till the Easter feast would be over to kill him, as he had killed James. No precaution had been omitted: in fact there was almost an extravagance of precaution. He had been cast into the inmost ward. You can hear door after door shut-to behind him, with a re-echoing clang. And then, to make assurance doubly sure, he is chained to two soldiers as Paul was, afterwards, in Rome. But there were some truths that Herod had yet to learn. And one of them was that when God Almighty works, 'stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage.' Behold the angel of the Lord came upon Peter, and a light shined in the prison. You can shut out a man's nearest and dearest from him, but no authority can shut the angels out. The angel touched Peter, and the chains fell off him. And the angel led him out from ward to ward. The iron gate swung back upon its hinges, and Peter was out under the stars again. And the angel and Peter passed on through one street, and forthwith the angel departed from him, for his work was done.

The deliverance came through prayer. The Church had no weapon against the army, the prison, the mighty power of Herod except the weapon of prayer. But they used that weapon and prevailed. The entire Church, or what remained of it, prayed on and on, night and day. The stream of supplication was never inter-

rupted; individuals might come and go, but the assembly itself was never suspended. One long, earnest, continuous appeal was poured forth to heaven that Peter should be set free. And yet, when the angel opened the prison gates for Peter, and he stood knocking at the door of Mary, the assembled Christians refused at first to believe that their prayer was answered. 'It is his ghost,' they said. The answer had come so suddenly. When the last hour had almost struck, when the breath of death was upon their faces, they were delivered as by miracle. It seemed too good to be realized.

1. The greatest force in the world is prayer, if we only knew how to use it. Prayer is the spiritual controlling the natural, and who is to say how far that control can extend? Prayer is thought winged by will; and is there anything in the wide universe that cannot be made to yield to thought? Behind every so-called material fact of our experience is a spiritual fact of which it is the expression. As Bergson has so impressively pointed out, Spirit (or life) is essentially free; matter, whatever it is, is not free, is inert and inoperative except as moved by spirit. See what spirit, as directed by man, is doing at this moment. Working with the universal spirit, not independently, we have managed to overcome the laws of gravity so far as to fly higher than any bird has ever flown. Shakespeare's Puck declared that he could put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes; to-day an intelligent message can be flashed from mind to mind around the globe in as many seconds. And these are, indeed, the triumphs of spirit, though as yet they have not risen far above mere utilitarian levels. It is mind that moves them; they are ideas ensouling material forces, vast and subtle powers rendering obedience to the human will. In a sense they are all the result of prayer, the effective demand of the human spirit upon the resources of the universal spirit.

Have you observed this very remarkable thing—that in the teaching of Jesus the most unreserved encouragement is given to the practice of prayer and the assurance bestowed that prayer can achieve any earnestly desired end? We are accustomed to hedge the subject about with a great many cautions, but Jesus did not. He never hesitates, never qualifies, never bids us prepare for disappointment. His language is strong, clear, and uncompromising. 'All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.' 'Verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Do men remove mountains by faith and prayer? Of course they do—even physical mountains, though not by standing still and looking at them. No man has ever yet done any great thing in the world on any other condition, even though sometimes the requisite faith and prayer have not been consciously directed to God, but only to the universal order. Probably Jesus was not thinking of physical mountains, however. He was thinking of mountains of prejudice, stupidity, selfishness, and ignorance—mighty institutions, ancient prisons of the soul, venerable shams, seemingly invincible superstitions. Forth went His Galileans in His name and challenged these, and they vanished away. Where is the huge Roman empire now? Where is the petty monarchy that sought to stamp out the praying Church alluded to in the text? Think of the audacity of that humble fisherman, locked up in Herod's jail, daring to attack those agglomerations of material power with no weapon but the prayer of faith offered in the name of his Lord.

¶ I see a man with no very brilliant intellect, filled with faith, go down to some mission district where there is a perfect mountain of prejudice, paganism, and indifference. It seems a slight thing to go down—just this man with his faith. I go there five or ten years afterwards, and find the church crowded to the doors, and round him a warm-hearted, enthusiastic band of people, some of the public-houses shut up, and the moral tone of the whole place changed. How has it been done? Simply and solely by his faith. Faith has removed mountains; he has thrown himself upon God—God has answered to the call. He has gone in the name of Jesus Christ, and the Lord has been working with him, and therefore what has happened is that his faith has removed mountains, as was promised.[1]

2. Are we just like those Jerusalem Christians in their utter surprise at the success of their

[1] A. F. W. Ingram, *The Gospel in Action*, 119.

prayers, except that we are less heroic than they were? Those solid prison walls were ever before their vision and they seemed stronger than anything they could do. They were believing in them and in the strength of Herod's cruel arm more than in the power of God. That is just what we do. We have faith—in the wrong thing.

There are people who think they have no faith. They have—heaps of it—only it happens to be faith in misfortune, or calamity, or sorrow; to crush and bind their souls. Or, if they are of another mood, perhaps their faith is in the power of money, or of some other method of taking advantage of their fellow-creatures and securing their own interests. They pray, too, though they say they don't. If all spiritually-minded people prayed as earnestly, things would soon be all right with the world. They get what they want because they demand it from life, and life sends it. Their will is always sending out requests to the universe; their thought tells; they gather to themselves the forces necessary to accomplish their desire. Would that all the people of God would take a lesson from the worldly-minded and pray with the determination to prevail. Have we never been surprised when we have prayed for a particular blessing and got it, thus betraying that we never absolutely expected to get it? Millions of prayers of that sort are going up from anxious hearts every day; they cry to God and they shut the door in His face.

¶ George Müller, one of the mightiest souls in prayer that modern times have known, has told us in his autobiography how he came to learn his lesson in this regard. He says that he used to pray at first in a more or less perfunctory manner, asking for a benefit and then ignoring his own request, going on as if he had never prayed at all. He confesses that it was a wonder he got on so well as he did considering the feebleness with which his petitions were presented at the throne of grace. But he woke up to the fact that he was neutralizing the effect of his own petitions by his want of confidence therein. He saw that he was actually working against them by his doubts and fears—or, more often, not so much by doubts and fears as by his belief in the unlikelihood of his getting what he wanted. He was taking way off his ship, running his dynamo at a third of its voltage. So he stopped that, and, as he simply records in his diary, when he asked anything from God afterwards he expected to get it, looked out for the answer, was constantly on the *qui vive*, so to speak, to welcome it when it came.

Another thing—he never presumed to dictate to God in reference to the subject of his prayers. He expected to be shown whether it was God's will that he should go on praying for a specific end or not. If a project began to take shape in his mind, he would sometimes spend weeks, even months, in asking to be made sure it was God's will he should proceed with it. Unless that assurance was forthcoming he would not take another step, but as soon as he got it he prayed about every detail as it arose, feeling as certain of the result as though it were already complete, as sooner or later it always was. Never once, he declares, in an exceptionally long life of Christian service did he know God to fail him; never once was he confounded.[1]

¶ The orphanages founded by Dr Müller on Ashley Down, Bristol, are still, as ever, a witness and a challenge to faith and prayer. When the 122nd anniversary of Dr Müller's birthday was celebrated, Dr Bergin, the director of the institution, recalled that when Müller died in 1898, many said 'The work cannot go on,' but it goes on still, supported in exactly the same way as during his lifetime—by dependence on prayer and without public appeals.[2]

Why cannot God honour our requests without insisting that we shall believe beforehand in His intention and ability to do so? One might write a letter, say, to some powerful human person, asking for a situation or something of the sort; one could not absolutely tell that he would accede to the request and bestow the favour sought; one could only hope and wait and see. Why should it be otherwise in our dealings with God? Because God works through personality. He can work independently of it, but not in His bestowal of the highest gifts. He can do all that a human friend can do, but His most effective action is not from without, but from within the human soul. No human friend can help us far without our own co-operation; no more can God; there must be a correspondence between the inward state and the outward gain, or the latter is no gain. You have often, no doubt,

[1] R. J. Campbell.
[2] *The Christian World*, Oct. 6, 1927.

found that out when you have tried to benefit somebody who was not really fit to appreciate the opportunity thus conferred. And it is a law of the spirit that we must co-operate with God, must interpose no barriers of fear and distrust between Him and the good we seek to win.

Belief in the answer to prayer does not mean that we need never know pain, sorrow, or conflict; that God will always stay the hand of death at our appeal or shield us from having to know the bitterness of losing precious human fellowships and associations. But if we are accustomed to dwell at the source of all comfort, we shall be sustained in the darkest hour and brought triumphantly through all tribulation and anguish of heart. And we may come to know whether God is going to answer our prayer in the way we desire, or whether it is best that He should not. Then we shall say, 'Thy will, not mine, be done.'

¶ When Captain Hedley Vicars was in the Crimean War, Miss Marshall, the lady to whom he was engaged, and her aunt, Miss Marsh, prayed continually that his life might be spared. He was, as we know, shot; but the ladies came in time to see that after all their prayers were not unanswered, and confessed as much in these words, 'We asked life of thee, and thou gavest him long life, even for ever and ever.'[1]

The Visit of the Angel

Acts xii. 8, 10.—'The angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals . . . The angel departed from him.'

THERE is a vividness of detail about this story which assures us that facts are being recorded. No imagination, however lively, could have conceived the scene that is presented here. When a man has played a part in some great hour, or been an eye-witness of some memorable action, there is a note in his telling of it, no matter how he blunders, which is better than all the periods of historians. And unless we be blinded by a foolish prejudice, which deadens the literary as well as other faculties, we cannot but distinguish that note here.

1. *The Coming of the Angel.*—'Behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, and his chains fell off from his hands.' Then, dazed with the sudden light as Peter was, thinking he dreamed and that his dream was idle, the angel said to him, 'Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals.' These words are the angel's arguments that what had happened was actually true. Peter was fast asleep when the light shone; asleep, and it was the night before his execution. A man must have a very good conscience, or a very dead one, to be able to sleep on such a night as that. Did Peter perhaps remember that our Lord had said to him, 'Thou shalt be old,' and account himself immortal till that word was fulfilled? What we know is that he was sleeping, and that he may have been the only Christian in the city asleep that night. Then in a moment the cell was all resplendent, and the glory of it pierced the sleep of Peter; and he opened his eyes, and the visitant was there, and he was dazed and 'dark with excessive bright.' Was this a dream, and waking would be vain?—'Peter, bind on thy sandals, gird thyself. Art thou in doubt as to whether it is real? Employ the light I bring to tie thy shoe-latchet. Do not seek to handle me; do not inquire my name. Do not wait there wondering if it is all a dream. Gird up thy mantle and bind thy sandals on; and thou wilt speedily discover all is true.' Peter obeyed and bound on his sandals and cast his garment about him and followed the angel. It was all so leisurely, and so unfearing, and so complete.

(1) Do we see the meaning of that Divine procedure? It makes us *fellow-workers with the Highest.* Peter needed the angel for his rescue, but for the rescue the angel needed Peter. So Peter was lifted out of mere passivity, and made a fellow-labourer with God. We see an illustration of this in the harvest-field, where men are busy amid the golden grain. The ministry of God has given the harvest, and now the ministry of man must bring it home. Or we see it when we look on men struggling heavenward, wrestling towards heaven 'gainst storm and wind and tide.' It is God who has wrought in them to do His will, and now they must work out their own salvation. Do we not sometimes wonder why it should be so hard to win the crown which God delights to give? The answer is that thus we are ennobled, and called into fellowship with the Divine, and raised to

[1] E. J. Hardy, *Doubt and Faith*, 151.

be sharers in the work of grace. All that you cannot do, God will do. All that you can do, God will never do. But gird thyself; do not ask God to do it. It is only a fool who would be idle because he was assured the light had come.

¶ The 'Senior Partner' was Stead's favourite term for God. He always held that it was no use sitting down and expecting Providence to do a man's work for him. We must first seek earnestly for 'signposts,' and having found them we must 'go ahead' with all our might, asking God to be our Senior Partner and realizing that He will expect us to carry out our full share of the undertaking. Sometimes, he admitted good-humouredly, he made the mistake of trying to take too large a share of the business on to his own shoulders, and he quoted many a good story against himself, à propos, such as, for instance his father's dry query, 'Aren't you going to leave a little for the Lord Himself to do, William?'[1]

(2) The text suggests to us also, a certain *leisureliness in God's procedure.* The angels are always bent upon their ministry, but we never find an angel in a hurry. We know the kind of man that Peter was, and how ardent and impulsive was his nature. He was always swift to speak, and swift to act, too often without any reckoning of consequence. But had the calmest and most phlegmatic spirit been the tenant of that Apostle's breast, it might well have been stirred into feverish haste that morning. Every moment was precious, and every moment perilous. Another instant and the soldiers might awake. Alive to his danger and to his opportunity, can we wonder if Peter clean forgot his sandals? And then the angel, calm amid that tumult, with a calmness born of fellowship with God, said 'Gird thyself and put thy sandals on.' Was his girdle ever so rebellious as on that morning in the prison-house? Were his sandals ever so refractory as when every moment meant life or death to Peter; but there was something imperious about this angel, and Peter had no choice but to obey.

2. *The Departure of the Angel.*—Having led the Apostle through the street the angel departed from him. Now, we see why the angel left the disciple then. There is strong doctrine in the departing of the angel. Sometimes the angels leave us for our sin. We are so coarse, and evil-inclined and worldly, it would stain and sully their white robes to walk with us. They try it for one street—for we have all our chance; but it does not prove 'the street which is called Straight.' There is always a dying out of vision when a man or woman loses the child-like heart, and the dying of vision is the departing angel. Sometimes, then, the angel leaves the soul—the brightness fades, the presence of white-robed purity is lost—and all because a man is growing worldly. But that was clearly not the case with Peter. Right to the end, through all the struggle and the storm of life, he preserved, as only the greatest do, the great heart of a little child. If every child has got its guardian angel, the Apostle would not be lacking. Yet for all that, when they had passed through one street, the angel departed from Simon Peter. And it is not difficult to see why. The angel's work was done; that is the point. There was no more need for the ministry of miracle. Peter was a man among men now; in the familiar streets, freed from his shackles, and with friends to go to—it was at that point the angel went away. There was the presence of Christ for Simon Peter now; there was God in His eternal law and love; but there was no need for the angel any more. His task was over when the chains were snapt, and the last gate between Peter and liberty swung wide.

We see the same economy of power when we study the miracles of Jesus Christ. It is an added evidence for Jesus' miracles that the miraculous is kept down to the lowest point. He makes the wine, but will not fetch the water; it is in the power of the servants to do that. He feeds the famishing thousands on the hill, but the disciples must bring the bread and distribute it. The hand of man must roll away the stone when Lazarus is to be summoned from the grave, and when the breath of life has been bestowed, it is for others to unwrap his cerements.

The helpful doctrine of the departing angel is a feature of God's dealing that has been somewhat neglected in our thought. It means that in extraordinary difficulties we may reasonably look for extraordinary help. It means that when we are shut in prison walls, and utterly helpless to extricate ourselves, God has unusual

[1] Edith K. Harper, *Stead: The Man*, 8.

powers in reserve, that He is willing to dispatch to aid His own. But when the clamant need goes, so does the angel. In the open street, under the common sky, do not expect miraculous intervention. It was better for Peter's manhood, and it is better for ours, that only the hour of the dungeon should bring that. The angel departs, but the law of God abides. The angel departs, but the love of Christ remains.

¶ Mark Rutherford illustrates his favourite text, 'From the horns of the wild oxen thou hast answered me,' by the story of Little Nell, in the *Old Curiosity Shop*. When poor Nell was trying to lead her old grandfather away from the contaminations of the city that had so degraded him, into the sweetness and purity of the green fields and leafy lanes of the peaceful country-side, there came a time when it really seemed as if she had reached the end of everything. She could scarcely drag one foot before the other: she was utterly famished: all her resources were exhausted. At that crisis she saw a stranger along the road in front of her. Loosing her grandfather's hand, she darted on before him and attempted to overtake the figure ahead. The man was trudging slowly along, absorbed in a book that he was reading. Nell crept upon him so softly that her approach did not disturb his studies. Then she began, in a few simple words, to implore his help. 'He turned his head. The child clapped her hands together, uttered a wild shriek, and fell senseless at his feet.' It was her old friend, the schoolmaster! The whole story takes a new and happier turn at that point. 'Here, then,' says Mark Rutherford, 'is the ancient gospel! From between the horns of the wild oxen—from *between their very horns*—had she been snatched!'[1]

¶ Great deliverances come to believers when hope is almost dead, when the doors are so many and so fast, and the enemies so strong and so wakeful that it seems as if the way were quite closed. The days when we have been rebuffed in every quarter and know not what further we can do! The time when it seems as if every effort has been foiled and there is none other we can make! The day when we catch at the last chance! When we think of one more succour that may be available, of one heart left in the world that may yet pity—and try—and fail. The day when no answer comes to the last imploring appeal, or an answer which is a cold and cruel refusal! We are happy if in such an hour we can still trust and wait patiently for the interposition of God.[1]

[1] F. W. Boreham, *A Tuft of Comet's Hair*, 105.

Rhoda

Acts xii. 13.—'A damsel . . . named Rhoda.'

'Rhoda' means 'a rose.' It was a favourite name among slave girls as we learn from the literature and from the inscriptions of the period. And we are glad this incident has been preserved, because it enables us to find a place for the slave girl in the portrait gallery of the New Testament.

1. Rhoda was a slave. Her name being a Gentile name, and the fact of her servile condition, make it probable that she was not a Jewess. If one might venture to indulge in a guess, it is not at all unlikely that her mistress, Mary, John Mark's mother, Barnabas' sister, a well-to-do woman of Jerusalem, who had a house big enough to take in the members of the Church in great numbers, and to keep up a considerable establishment, had brought this slave girl from the island of Cyprus. At all events, she was a slave, and carried the marks of this degrading bondage. In another household the treatment meted out to her might have been very different. It was a Jewish writer who reminded Jewish masters and mistresses:

Yoke and thong will bow the weak,
And for an evil servant there are racks and tortures.

Rhoda was fortunate in finding service in the house of Mary, and when Mary accepted the Christian gospel and became a follower of Jesus, that meant another step in the emancipation of Rhoda. Thus early had the leaven of the gospel begun to do its beneficent work, and when it was determined to leave the island of Cyprus and settle in Jerusalem, Rhoda must not be cast adrift; she must go with them and be cared for as one of the family. And so we find her in Jerusalem in the house of Mary, the serving maid still, but also a sister in Christ.

2. When the sound of knocking is heard Rhoda comes out from the prayer meeting to open the gate. It was part of her work 'to

[1] W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Seen and the Unseen*, 76.

answer the door,' and so she left off praying to go and do it. It was of little use to be praying on one side of the shut door when on the other Peter was standing in the street, and the day was beginning to dawn; Herod's men would be after him as soon as daylight disclosed his escape. The one thing needful for him was to be taken in and sheltered. So the praying group, and the girl who stops praying when she hears the knock which it was her business to attend to, were working in the same direction. It is not necessary to insist that no heights or delights of devotion and secret communion are sufficient excuses for neglecting or delaying the doing of the smallest task which is our duty. If our business is to keep the door, we will not be leaving, but abiding in the secret place of the Most High, if we go down to open it. The commonest acts of daily life are truer worship than solitary communion, or united prayer, if the latter can be secured only by the neglect of the former.

And we may find here an illustration of another great truth—that the smallest things, done in the course of the quiet discharge of recognized duty, and being, therefore, truly worship of God, have in them the quality of immortality. It was not only the lofty and unique expression of devotion which another woman gave, when she broke the alabaster box to anoint the feet of the Saviour which were to be pierced with nails on the morrow, that has been held worthy of undying remembrance. The name and act of a poor slave girl have been commemorated by that Spirit, who preserved nothing in vain, in order that we should learn that things which we call great, and those which we call small, are regarded by Him, not according to their apparent magnitude, but according to their motive and reference to Him.

3. Just before Rhoda left the little company the brethren were praying ardently for the Apostle's release. Now here he is at the door! 'She opened not the door for gladness.' When Samuel heard the voice of God in the sanctuary he got up in the morning and opened the Temple doors. But when Rhoda heard the voice of Peter she left the door shut in Peter's face. Was she afraid to open at that hour? Like the sister in *Comus*, she was too innocent to fear. She opened not the door *for gladness*. It was her joy that kept her from her duty. The incident is simple and most illuminative. Shall we not say that it suggests that we must watch our moments of exultation, our delights, our season of ecstasy? In our joy we may forget many needful things. Is not this true of the joy of a revival? Is it not true that very frequently we open not the gate for gladness? There are converts who, in the delight of revival meetings, forget common courtesies. They have rapturous eagerness to get away to the foreign field, and they forget to send a letter to their aged mother at home. They ignore the humdrum ministry, in the glad contemplation of the field afar off. There are some people who are so glad in the Lord that they go about writing Scripture-texts on other people's property! Surely that is a forgetfulness which a little vigilance would avoid. Our joy becomes perilous when it makes us forget the immediate duty. That door! Open it! That little duty! Discharge it!

4. Now let us go into the meeting itself. The brethren have been praying, 'Lord, restore him unto us!' Rhoda eagerly returns with the announcement that Peter is at the gate. Now what? Peter has to remain standing in the street, liable to re-arrest at any moment, while the people inside the house, who have met there for the express object of praying for his deliverance, maintain the absurdity of supposing that their prayer could have been answered. They tell the girl that she is mad to say such a thing, and when she sticks to her story they conclude that she must have seen his ghost. And so they went on debating the matter, while all the time the answer was waiting at the door. If it were not too sorrowful the situation would be half humorous. Surely the best thing would be to open the door at once, which after a while they did. 'When they had opened the door they saw him and were astonished.'

¶ As Matthew Henry puts it, 'sometimes that which we most earnestly wish for, we are most backward to believe, because we are afraid of imposing upon ourselves, as the disciples, who, when Christ was risen, believed not for joy.'

Now, God's answers to our prayers ought not to surprise us into incredulity. These momentous occurrences ought to be daily commonplaces in our lives. The responses of the Almighty should be grand familiarities. Why should we suppose the herald of the answer to be mad?

God is good! God is faithful! It is the most natural of all things that the prison gates should open and the Apostle be free. The answer often comes knocking at the door but we don't let it in, and we never know that the answer has been given. We are in an unexpectant mood, and we have never suspected the wealth which the Lord would have left at our gate.

He answered all my prayer abundantly,
And crowned the work that to His feet I brought
With blessing more than I had asked or thought—
A blessing undisguised, and fair and free.

I stood amazed and whispered, 'Can it be
That He hath granted all the boon I sought?
How wonderful that He for me hath wrought!
How wonderful that He hath answered me!'

Oh, faithless heart! He *said* that he would hear
And answer thy poor prayer, and He *hath* heard
And proved His promise. Wherefore didst thou fear?
Why marvel that thy Lord hath kept His word?
More wonderful if He should fail to bless
Expectant faith and prayer with good success!

Habit Knocks at the Door

Acts xii. 16.—'But Peter continued knocking.'

Peter was a frightened and bewildered man, but he knew that he had come to the right door, and that beyond it was his own company. He had been in prison and in chains. But his chains had been smitten from his hands, the prison doors had been opened, and with his shining comrade he had passed out into freedom. No man could pass through such an experience without sudden and perilous reaction. Confused and stunned, in the frame of mind in which anything might have happened, he stood alone. He might well have simply fled anywhere blindly out of the city, and most likely into new dangers. But just then something old and powerful rose up in him and asserted itself—an old friendship stretched a hand in the dark to him; an old custom recovered its gracious hold; a remembered fellowship sent a calling fragrance through the doors of memory. When he had considered the thing, he came to the house where many were gathered together praying. In the danger moment a homing instinct arose and saved him.

When the inspiration leaves us, and we have to face a grey day or perhaps a dark night unhelped—what then? When spontaneity fails, need everything fail in the devout life? When the great experience is passed, and we are left in the common street with the common associations and perhaps temptations, and nothing else; no angel at all, but the probability of a devil round the very next corner—what then? Are there any abiding motives, independent of feelings and moods, upon which we can depend to keep our feet straight and order our goings, when the angel is gone away?

1. *Inspired Days.* We have our vibrant moments, when our best powers are tuned and alert for quick response to higher things. We say perplexedly and wonderingly about things in ourselves or our deeds so much beyond and better than our normal possibilities, 'The Spirit moved me.' Have we not known times when our spirits rose clean above the levels of ordinary experience, as if invisible currents lifted us up and carried us? Have we not known days when we found things which before had been insuperably difficult, now become singularly easy of accomplishment? Are there not times with us when thoughts spring to life and power within us which give life a larger meaning and range, and the soul in us comes into an unfamiliar freedom? Then can we run in a path on which a little while before we could scarcely walk without fainting. God has seemed very real and near, and fresh influences have come into the mind and heart like seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. These are our great hours. We cannot explain them, but we know them for what they are—prophecies of our unreached possibilities. We know not when they may come; there is no calculating the angel. But the heart is warned in an unexpected hour, and the spiritual horizon lifts and clears. These are our royal days, and they bring with them a power for the mastery of evil and the transforming of life.

But it comes to pass that the angel departs. As has been well said: 'God has so arranged the chronometry of our spirits that there shall be thousands of silent moments between the

striking hours.' Every life has its great experiences, but life does not consist of them. Life is not a series of crises. It is not a chaos of catastrophe any more than it is a succession of exalted visions. It is not all prison, and very certainly it is not all angel. Most of it is plain street. The angel goes away, and the path without passion or miracle or inspiration has to be footed. It is folly to bewail this. There are tides of the spirit and we need not put them down to infirmity and instability.

¶ In the occasionalism of piety I see not its shame but its distinctive glory; and would lay stress on the intermittency of the devout affections as the sign, not of poverty or weakness, but specifically of their grandeur in themselves and their accurate accordance with what is highest in God's realities. For, whether you stay at home and look in upon the composition of your own nature or go out into the universe and Providence of God, you will find this law: that, of His agencies and manifestations, it is the lowest that are least mutable, and most remain the same from first to last; whilst the highest have ever in them a tidal ebb and flow—moving in waves of time, and surprising hidden inlets of space with their flood.[1]

2. *Reserves for Uninspired Days.*—Are there reserves which we can lay up for ourselves beyond the reach of the fluctuations of feeling, upon which no thief of a mood, or robber circumstance, can break in and steal?

There must be an answer to this question. It would be a useless and futile religion that could not stand the test of the commonplace and the prosaic. Great songs can be sung without gorgeous singing-robes; kingliest acts can be wrought without crown or purple; sublimest sacrifice needs no glory of circumstance, as He proved once for all who became obedient unto the death of the Cross. Great art transfigures the commonplace, not by pretending that it is rare, but by realizing that it is common, and that its emotions and experiences are the raw material of greatness for the soul to shape and use, and that they hold destiny in their hands.

Only a man harrowing clods,
In a slow and silent walk,
With an old horse that stumbles and nods,
Half asleep as they stalk.

Only a thin smoke without flame
From the heaps of couch-grass,
Yet this will go onward the same,
Though dynasties pass.

Yonder a maid and her wight
Come whispering by:
War's annals will cloud into night
Ere their story die.

Part of the answer to this question is in *the cultivation of habit as a means of grace.* So many bad things are said of habit, and most of them are true. The spider's thread of a bad practice can become a thrice-twisted grapple of steel holding and dragging life. All character tends to final permanence. There are stern words of Scripture which set this in letters of flame: 'He that is unrighteous, let him be unrighteous still.'

This is no arbitrary fiat of the Almighty, but a grim statement of the law of habit that he who is unrighteous long enough will go on being unrighteous to the end. This is the sinister side of the philosophy of habit, but it is not the whole truth. There is a sunward side of habit. 'He that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.' Habit is not simply a diabolic influence for ever menacing us. It is a law of life, and, like every other law of life, is designed in the interests of life. It is meant to conserve and strengthen it in good. If by reason of use evil can lay hold upon us and master us, so by reason of use good grows also, and faith and hope, and moral vision and character.

Habit has its value for faith, and its place in the devout life. It is part of our religious business to organize our religious thoughts, feelings, and acts. We leave too many loose ends of these flapping about to trip us. We need a braced and girded religion.

¶ Commonly, when men speak of habits, they have bad habits in their mind. As Professor James, of Harvard, says in his *Talks on Psychology*: 'They talk of the smoking-habit, and of the swearing-habit, and of the drinking-habit, but not of the abstention-habit, or the moderation-habit, or the courage-habit.' After a certain output of deliberate effort and a period of practice, the vital virtues become second-nature; we acquire the instinct for self-denial, the prayer-habit, the Bible-reading-habit, the purity-habit,

[1] Martineau.

the truth-habit, the habits of faith, and hope, and love. Our receptive and expansive nature waits ready to incorporate all such pieties and virtues in its fibre and spontaneous movement. It is specially at the early stage that we have to bend our wills and drill our natural proclivities and watch ourselves with sentinel alertness. Time after time it is much 'against the grain' to keep up the good custom; but 'the grain' will soon 'grow to' the repeated demand, like the muscles of a child-acrobat, or the branches of a Japanese dwarf-tree. Every time we repeat the exercise in self-mastery or honour or devotion, by the law of *vis inertiæ* in Nature the power to keep on in the good way increases.[1]

(1) Consider this in relation to *prayer*. There are many who have a story like this to tell of themselves. They were accustomed to private and personal prayer since they were children. They have not grown godless, nor are they now altogether prayerless. Sometimes the fire kindles, and it is almost as easy to pray as in old time. Sometimes the pressure of life grows so that out of sheer necessity they pray again. But a time came when a creeping dulness and paralysis fell upon the spirit, and prayer grew first mechanical, then irksome, and then the practice dropped. The situation was accepted, and better no prayer at all than prayer that is unreal.

(2) Consider this in relation to *going to church* on Sundays. That, too, was an ingrained custom. But there came a time when a dull indifferentism infected the mind and soul. There is a Sunday when at church-time we do not feel like it. We used to go twice; then once. Then there was a hard week, or something went wrong at home, or the last time we were at church somebody stepped in before us and took the only seat in which, for some deep and solemn reason, we can worship God—or any one of those thousand reasons which are so final when we make them to ourselves.

But in abandoning the forms and customs of piety we are abandoning a reserve we cannot afford to lose. We say that spontaneity is a grace of true piety and worship. What is spontaneity? We do a thing spontaneously when we do it instinctively and without sense of compulsion or effort. But you will have observed how often in the common day a habit of work will carry you to tasks to which your own immediate inclination certainly would not lead you. Many a man tied to a city office all week wakes on Monday morning disgruntled and disgusted at the prospect of another week of the same old round. He will nevertheless catch the same old train, to sit on the same old office stool, at the same old ledgers. By midday he has been caught again by its interest; a little later he is keen enough, for he has scented new business, and going home that night he is so satisfied that he will talk shop all the way with you if you will let him. It sounds like a paradox, but it is actually a platitude of experience that habit is one of the conditions of spontaneity. The Spirit of God works through the facts of life, and one of the most persistent facts is the fact of habit.

Test this against the illustrations just named. It will be said that it is better not to pray than to pray perfunctorily, and that anything is better than unreality. Perhaps so; but the thing is here an irrelevancy. Prayer by an act of will is not less real than prayer by the high, irresistible prompting of the heart. The will needs cultivation in religion as much as the conscience, and a great deal more than the emotions. 'When thou hast shut to thy door,' said Jesus. To get that door shut will often need a summoned and sanctified will. If prayer has ceased to be for the time a privilege and a joy pray then as a duty. It seems incredible that a moving iceberg—bleak, grim, and enormous—should ever dissolve at all. But when the warm waters of the Gulf Stream begin to flow round its edges and its base, it is a swiftly disappearing thing. God has given to us, who have these freezing troubles of the soul, the power of self-direction. Set a summoned will to keep the course, and you will strike the healing waters.

> We cannot kindle when we will
> The fire which in the heart resides;
> The spirit bloweth and is still,
> In mystery our soul abides.
> But tasks in hours of insight will'd
> Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd.[1]

Worship, too, must not be left to depend upon impulse alone. We brand it as weakness that a man should be at the mercy of inclination and

[1] R. E. Welsh, *Man to Man*, 129.

[1] Matthew Arnold.

vagrant impulse in other things. Why dress it up as a virtue in the greatest concern of all? We need the habit of worship to hold us to the serious aspects of life, without regard for which character grows thin, and life itself paltry. It is our safeguard in many a difficult time.

We isolate ourselves at our peril from the forms of the religious and Christian life. They are the strongest of conserving powers. We need the help of devout habit to hold us against our own caprice, to keep us in the way against our own waywardness. You never know when the groove worn deep by a good habit may not become the channel of God's floodtide.

The Grace of Continuance

Acts xii. 16.—'But Peter continued knocking.'

Ruskin has it that if out of a Turner landscape you cut a quarter of an inch of sky, within that single quarter of an inch you would feel the infinity of heaven; and it may be there are lives like that, so penetrated with purpose or with passion that wherever you touch them you get the real character. As a general rule, however, it is a perilous thing to judge a man by any single action. In his great hours he may be greater than himself; possibly he may be less than his true self. And always it is wisest, if you would judge a person not by the tenor of his life but by an action, to see that the action is of a usual kind. There was an hour when Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of the priest's servant with it. There was another hour when, panic-stricken, he denied his Lord. But if we wish to know the real Peter let us take a commonplace action such as this—*Peter continued knocking.*

1. This common act shows Peter's *courage.* It makes that unmistakable. Whoever it was who stood there in the street, it was not a panic-stricken man. When Peter broke prison we know what hour it was; it was the fourth watch of the night. This indicates that it was no longer dark; the day was beginning to glimmer in the east. And the smoke of the household fires was mounting heavenward, and the first footfalls were echoing on the pavements, *and Peter continued knocking.* Shrouded in the darkness of the third watch, he might have been reasonably safe out in the street. But, when the sun was rising, it was at his peril that he delayed a moment. He was doing a very usual thing and yet it was a courageous thing to do; far more courageous than that whirling passion which plucked the sword out of the scabbard once. And it sprang from the certainty that God was with him, and having rescued him would not desert him now.

That is a lesson we would do well to learn about the essential quality of courage. Just to continue knocking patiently may be braver than the most gallant deed. When the soldier dismounts to save a wounded comrade—when the fireman risks his life to save a child—there is something in that which strangely moves the heart. But that is the courage which is thrilling rather than the courage which is telling. The truest courage in this life of ours is seldom momentary or spectacular. It moves in the shadow of the dreary street; dwells in the dull seclusion of the home; continues doing things, with quiet heart, when the natural impulse would be to turn and flee. Just to get up each dull and dreary morning and say, 'Please God I shall play my part to-day'; just to go out and do it quietly in the teeth of wearinesses and ingratitudes; just to shut our ears to calling voices and bear our daily cross victoriously, is the finest heroism on this side the river. No man is ever far from the heroic who has learned to do things when he feels least like them. There is little hope for a man in this strange world who surrenders to his whimsies every morning. To trample under foot all moods and feelings—to get to our duty and our cross in spite of them—to do *that* summer and winter, is the one road to the music and the crown. That was pre-eminently true of Christ. His was the courage of continuance.

¶ To live an ordinary life well is the greatest of all deeds. To utter noble thoughts at a time, to do great actions in the heat of emulation and on the field—that is less severe. To do well the common things of life, to do them always well—that is hardest.[1]

2. This common action reveals to us Peter's *understanding.* Clearly he did not misinterpret what was happening within the house. Con-

[1] A. B. Davidson.

trast him, for instance, with Naaman. When Naaman was bidden go and wash in Jordan, he thought that the prophet was making light of him. So Naaman turned, and went away in a rage, because he misinterpreted the prophet. We are always ready for misinterpretation when we knock or ring at a door and no one answers; doubly ready when we see peering faces behind the glass of the door or through the blind. And that is precisely what Peter had to bear, for Rhoda came and looked and went away again, and yet Peter understood it perfectly. The fact is he understood their feelings by what had happened that morning to himself. That is always how we understand people. Half an hour earlier Peter had seen an angel, and he had been dazed and thought it was a ghost; and now *they* think that Peter is a ghost, and he instantly grasps the situation. That is why he did not stalk away. He understood from his own stupefaction how terrified they would be for a few moments. And so he stood there, out in the street at daybreak, and continued knocking.

Is it not usually in that way that people come to know we understand them? To be misunderstood is a true grief and one which Christ experienced to the full. A man is never himself—never at his best—when he is surrounded by misunderstanding. But when a man feels that he is understood he casts aside reserve and is himself, and he generally feels that through common touches.

¶ We may recall that poignant scene in A. S. M. Hutchinson's famous novel, *If Winter Comes*, where the devoted and self-sacrificing Mark Sabre husbands his time in order that he may come home for a half-holiday to delight his wife, Mabel, with the unexpected pleasure of companionship. On his return he encounters only a frosty displeasure, an interrogation as to why he has returned from work at such an unusual hour. There is no understanding, no appreciation of this thoughtfulness, no gratitude for his eagerness to enrich the life of their home, nothing but cruel, unbending rigidity, the weapon which falls hardest upon those who are eager to save and to serve.[1]

There are people who have a genius for understanding. By a kindly question, by a homely word, by a little deed of kindness light as gossamer, men waken to find that they are understood. If we have genius or wealth, let us consecrate them all to noble causes. But if we can only do quite common kindnesses, let us not neglect them while the days are hurrying, for they tell men that they are understood.

The memory of a kindly word
For long gone by,
The fragrance of a fading flower
Sent lovingly,
The gleaming of a sudden smile
Or sudden tear,
The warmer pressure of the hand,
The tone of cheer.
The hush that means 'I cannot speak,
But I have heard!'
The note that only bears a verse
From God's own word—
Such tiny things we hardly count
As ministry,
The givers deeming they have shown
Scant sympathy.
But when the heart is overwrought,
Oh, who can tell
The power of such tiny things
To make it well!

3. This common action reveals to us Peter's *consecration*. He stood there knocking—and half an hour before he had been in the royal company of angels. It is all very well for a beggar to stand and knock. A doorstep may be a beggar's proper place. But Peter had had an experience that morning which had lifted him up into the courts of heaven. A little while before, he had come to a great iron gate. And at a single touch of the angelic finger that gate had opened. And now he was at no massive iron gate, but at the humble door of a very humble dwelling. Had this chapter been a mediæval legend, you would have had that cottage door fly open also. But the Book of Acts is no Arabian Nights: it is true to experience, and it is true to character. For sometimes the massive gates, which we have dreaded, at the touch of God fly open when we reach them; and the little doors are the hardest to get through.

Now, unquestionably, as it was with Peter so is it with every one of us. There is no such certain mark of consecration as just to return like that to common levels. We too have our

[1] G. Stewart, *The Crucifixion in Our Street*, 61.

hours of vision. And then, like Peter, we have to go back to common doors, where there is no mystery of blood upon the lintel, and the question is what we shall do then. There are some who are too unsettled to do anything. They could have knocked yesterday; they cannot knock to-day. They have lost all interest in common tasks, and the dreary round of duty is unbearable. But he who is consecrated as Simon Peter was through the pardoning and restoring love of Christ will continue knocking. Deepened by sorrow, purified by love, he will go with a faithful heart to his day's work. He will continue knocking till the door shall open, and faces that he has loved will answer his, in a fellowship where time and space are not.

The Call

Acts xiii. 2.—'The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.'

What constitutes a definite call to work as a missionary? What is the kind of pressure which ought to send young people away from their own countries to live a life of full-time religious service among people of another race?

Let us think for a moment of the beginning of the missionary enterprise, when Barnabas and Saul were dedicated to it. As we try to picture what is narrated for us at the beginning of this chapter, we see what might very well have appeared to an outside observer to be a somewhat eccentric proceeding. A little group of persons under the influence of the Divine enthusiasm sends out two of its number into the world to do some undefined work. Those two set out, 'sent thus by the Holy Spirit.' The whole thing looked as insignificant as it was eccentric. But we see it now in another light; we see that the world had been prepared to receive the Christian religion. The Roman Government had unified the world that lay around the Mediterranean Sea. The Greek language had provided a common medium of intercourse. Jewish synagogues all along the lines of trade had prepared the way for the belief in the one true God. The missionary enterprise began 'in the fullness of time.' Not only so, but the new religion of Christianity was just beginning to discover itself. Out of the chrysalis of Judaism it was emerging with wings, as a universal religion. That insignificant-looking action of the few men in Antioch marks a turning-point in the whole world's history.

1. *The Holy Spirit a Familiar Reality.*—'As they ministered the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul.' That is a wonderfully intimate way of speech. To these first believers the Holy Ghost was a familiar reality, the vicar and administrator of their glorified Saviour, working among them the gracious purposes of their Lord, taking holy men and women into His confidence, telling them His secrets, qualifying them for service. He was their genius, their ability and inspiration, their wealth and wisdom and strength. Can it be that we have lost the High Presence—the sense of intimacy and assurance and the habit of inviting and expecting His confidence?

¶ When she was twenty-two years of age Catherine Marsh passed through a spiritual experience that left its mark on her after life. Although she had written and spoken of the Holy Spirit's work, she had not realized, until she read a small volume of sermons on the subject by the Rev. J. Harrington Evans, what is revealed in the Scriptures concerning His Personality—that He can comfort, teach, bring to remembrance, command or forbid, can love and can be grieved. Then she determined that she would not cease to pray that He, the Spirit of Truth, would reveal Himself to her mind and heart. Her fervent prayer was soon answered; and afterwards she wrote to Miss Maitland: 'Oh, Cary, I have learnt so to love and trust in "the Holy Ghost the Comforter." He was only an Influence to me once, now I *know* He is equal to the Father, and to the Son, in the Reality of His *Share* in the Godhead, *and all it is to me.*'[1]

It was plainly in this intimacy of the familiar Spirit of God that the missionary conviction was born within the Church. Mark it well, because, while it does not exclude, it obviously completely supersedes something upon which we have become accustomed to set almost all the emphasis. Nothing whatever is said about the obligation they felt for the saving of the lost, and the conversion of mankind. This compulsion concerning the Gentiles was not

[1] L. E. O'Rorke, *The Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh*, 36.

the compulsion of conscience, but the inevitability of an experience of grace within themselves. Why was it that the great missionary, with all his evangelistic passion, said nothing to the Churches at Rome, Ephesus, and Corinth—which were the direct fruit of his own missionary labours—about their responsibility for the conversion of mankind? Such an omission cannot be an accident. Surely it is not, because if such work is done only because it *ought* to be done it will certainly fail. Surely it is because the *ought* of duty becomes superfluous when the *must* of an inevitable and irresistible impulse is operative. We are constantly hearing the reiteration of the idea of duty in relation to the gigantic enterprise of missions. Without belittling it we should have discovered by this time that, if missionary service is to have life and force in it, something very different from the reiteration of the idea of responsibility alone is necessary. It is when a Church is alive and quick with the life of the Divine Spirit, eagerly receiving as He opens to them the 'other things' of Christ, that missions have their inevitable rise, and the Church girds itself for its apostolate.

2. *God's Separated Men.*—'The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul.' We wonder how they came to be so sure that the Spirit of God spake thus. Was it that in the midst of this Church's prayerful life there grew up a conviction that the Lord had been training and equipping two of their fellow-labourers, and that the meaning of it was that the great harvest field was calling these two out of their midst? God had set the light of great enterprises in the eyes of these two men, and was preparing for them. One of them had kept a secret word for long in his heart: 'I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.' He knew that the time of its full revealing would come, and presently it did come. It was by the sight of the great, mighty-faithed Barnabas, and the indomitable energy and courage of Paul among these Christians of Antioch, by the unspeakable conviction that there was something in these two which could not be cabined within a local church, that the irresistible missionary argument was brought to bear upon this Church.

Now we feel that it is in this fashion that God speaks to the Church still concerning its too easily forgotten tasks. God is always putting forth His men. They arise with the call of God plainly upon them, the capacity for long visions shining in them. He finds them in a little Syrian community, and lo! Paul and Barnabas are given to make great history. He moves in a Jesuit fraternity and Francis Xavier becomes pioneer of the Cross. He is at work in little Christian communities, in Scotch hamlets and Welsh villages, and amid English factories and workshops, and now it is a Livingstone and a Mackay or a Griffith John or a John Paton that is thrust forth.

¶ Who was it that called Carey to be the great leader of foreign missions at the end of the eighteenth century? Did the Church do it? Judge by the antagonism of fifteen years which that single-handed man bravely confronted! Who was it that sent Carey to India, and made him the means of giving the Bible to forty different languages and dialects? Carey was the last man that would have been thought of in any human election to do this stupendous work—a shoemaker, and a journeyman shoemaker at that! Who was it that chose David Livingstone to be the missionary general and explorer of Africa, and took him out of a factory near Glasgow to become the greatest missionary, in some respects, since the days of the Apostle Paul? And who was it that sent Robert Morrison to China, the last-maker of Morpeth? And who was it that sent John Williams to the South Seas, the foundryman from the London forge, to become the regenerator of Western Polynesia? There never was Divine counsel and wisdom more wonderfully shown in human affairs than in the selection of these men, and hundreds of others that might be mentioned in this more than apostolic succession.[1]

¶ John Paton writes: 'I do love Christ. He is simply everything to me, the first, the last, and all between.'

From the lone station in the coral island,
Waters divide me and a waste of seas,
But still my heart is true. Their land is my land,
And in my dreams I see my Hebrides.

3. *The Missionary not an Experimenter.*—'They sent them forth' and 'they went.' They

[1] A. T. Pierson.

went forth with no experience of results at all. These had all to be made. What we see is that they were just as sure of their call, just as sure of Christ's gospel and of the world's need at the beginning as at the end. With a great missionary history behind us we are apt to make results the ground of our missionary argument; and we do not say that it is not effective ground. But the conclusion of this Church about missions was all from above downwards and not from below upwards. They did not deduce missions from observation; they could not deduce them from experience of the service; they deduced them from Christ as the Holy Spirit took of His things and showed them to their responsive hearts. It has always been so with the true missionaries and the true missionary churches. They have not said, 'Here is a mad, bad world; let us try Christ on it.' They have not gone with the gospel as an experiment. It was the nature and necessity of the gospel that sent them. They were moved, not by human need, but by God's grace. Yet these men *did* feel the need of the Roman world of their day. Can we read passages like the first of Romans and doubt that for Paul an ever-compelling motive was the sense of the terrible moral consequences of idolatry which he saw all about him? And these men *did* rejoice in the new opportunities for the spread of truth which their age afforded; it was these very men who first talked about 'open doors.' But along with the meeting of need and opportunity there was something else, and a good Hebrew felt that the 'something else' was the all-important thing. The pressure of God's Spirit was *the* thing which must be mentioned when the event was told to others; it was the decisive, all-embracing factor in the situation; the whole thing was really told when Luke put down 'the Spirit said.'

Need, opportunity, Divine pressure combine to make the Call. The missionary motive is changeless, but the missionary outlook is wonderfully and amazingly changed. We hear to-day that India and Japan are the finest markets for our cheap reprints of scientific and sociological pamphlets and books. So far from the need of Christian missions having been superseded by the changes of modern thought and outlook there is an imperative need—a need, political and social as well as religious—for giving an adequate substitute for the faiths which the entrance of Western culture is fast utterly destroying. Is it less urgent to give Christ to a civilized world than to an uncivilized? Surely not. In India and China the great choice is fast becoming not between Christ and Buddha, but between Christ and the gross and indefinitely perilous materialism, and with us lies the question whether the immediate future shall see the rise of long dormant races into power, with all its resources and all its diabolism, or permeated with the gracious restraints and illumined with the holy ideals of Christ.

Saul, who is also Paul

Acts xiii. 9.—'Saul, who is also Paul.'

In this quite casual, informal way—as it were in passing—we are introduced to the name by which the great Apostle is known through all the world, one of the most illustrious names in all history. Up to this particular passage in the Book of the Acts he has always been spoken of as Saul; but from this point onwards that appellation is heard no more, and Paul takes its place without a single exception. 'Saul, who is also Paul': we need not doubt that prior to his conversion he had borne both these names of similar sound, the Hebrew and the Roman one, interchangeably, a practice of which we have other instances, such as 'Joseph, who was surnamed Justus,' and 'Simeon that was called Niger'; nevertheless, there is something the reverse of accidental in the way in which, in this case, the one name is dropped for good at a certain juncture and the other adopted. It emphasizes the profound change that had taken place in the man himself. He had undergone a new birth; another self had taken the place of the former one—a self which, no doubt, had been slumbering in the depths of his being. For the rest, explain the change as we will, of the *fact* there is no doubt at all, Paul's whole subsequent life bearing witness to it.

Now we shall not go so far as to suggest that any of us actually encloses two separate or alternative personalities; it is significant enough for us to ponder what is so concisely stated in our text, namely, that Saul was also Paul, that in the persecutor and bitter enemy of the Cross

there was potentially present he who could say with profoundest conviction: 'For me to live is Christ.' Surely that conveys to us a message both of challenge and of cheer.

1. To the question whether the words are only a picturesque, bold phrase, or whether they strike at some reality, one might answer in the first place with the poet's line: 'We feel that we are greater than we know.' Sir Oliver Lodge once compared the proportion between our conscious and our unconscious ego to that between the seen and the submerged bulk of floating icebergs, only one-ninth of which appears above the ocean's surface. It stands to reason that the unseen eight-ninths count for something in determining the iceberg's course across the Atlantic, and it may well be that the unseen part of us, that which is inarticulate and unrealized, has a good deal to do with *our* course across the unchartered ocean of life.

In any case, there is more in us, and more of us, than appears on the surface; and to that extent it seems true that there is within us not only another self, but other selves, than that which we exhibit here and now. Out of a whole mass of material, out of ever so many possibilities, we have chosen these and these and those and fashioned our actual self, but is this the only self we could have fashioned? Is not the contrary quite evident? Could we not have been far other than we are? In one of his books Mr Galsworthy, with his delicate insight into character, makes a young fellow of nineteen muse in this strain: 'That was queer—you could do anything you like until you'd done it, but when you *had* done it, then you knew, of course, that you must always have had to.' That is the philosophy of nineteen, but it does not represent the facts of the case. A truer reflection, a deeper analysis, tells us that we *could* have acted otherwise at this juncture, chosen differently at that one, and by these different choices have woven our life into a different pattern. To the making of our actual self there have gone certain possibilities, selected, in many cases, almost at random, with little plan, with little wisdom, oftenest for the sole reason that they lay nearest to hand; and 'that other self' is the self unrealized. It amounts to this, that we have never yet claimed anything like our whole patrimony from God. We have none of us made of existence as fine a thing as we might have done.

The other self, then, with which most of us have had occasion to commune when we were quite alone, the business of the day laid by, is the *better* self, which has remained unrealized, not because realization was impossible but because we did not choose to exert ourselves sufficiently; the wish may have been there, but the concentrated purpose was lacking. There is, of course, another side to this: there were worse possibilities within us, which happily we kept from taking actual shape. In most of us—it would not be too much to say in all of us—there are elements of ancestral savagery, not extinct, but overlaid by a thin crust through which they might burst again, lava-like, given some exceptional impetus; there are what Tennyson called 'moods of tiger or of ape' in so-called civilized men, which may again be unchained, as the War years made only too horribly clear to us; there are, among the various other selves that all of us might be, some which we have probably had to struggle against and fight down into the abyss from which they had risen.

¶ Some one once told me—it may or may not be true, but it touched my imagination—that there are long-closed mines where fires still smoulder on and on through the years, faintly fanned by an unguessed-at draught which reaches them through some primal fissure in the earth; fires that are still ready to break into flames, darken the sky with smoke, flare to heaven if, by any chance, they are broken open, the pure, open air, in general so good, so healing, let in upon them.

I believe that we are all more or less like that, all with our buried fires. And though I look at the smug, the self-satisfied—the only people I ever think of as possibly and completely damned—and wonder and wonder, I am still, in the heart of me, unshaken in my belief. For, after all, it is those fires which seem most deeply buried, blanketed in earth, overgrown with grass, that may, in the end, prove the most dangerous, breathing out poisonous gases as well as fires. And though we are for ever saying: 'I would never have expected that of So-and-So,' do we not also say it of ourselves?—or at least draw back with a sort of amazed horror at the revelation

of those dark fires within ourselves: darker by far than the merely primitive, deeper than heart or mind.[1]

2. And now, what is the practical application of this?

(1) We must believe in our own potentialities. If we have done with the delusion that our actual selves represent our only possible selves; if that other self with which we are forced to commune from time to time is interpreted aright by us as what we are meant to be by God, then it is clear that something very important follows. You remember 'Saul, who is also Paul'; well, there is the Saul we are, holding the promise of the Paul we may be. Many of us have built a house of life for ourselves—poor, ill-planned and worse executed, mere precarious shelters—not because the materials were lacking for something more creditable, but because in so many instances we did not look out for any but the most obvious, easily-obtained materials, those requiring the least amount of effort to put together. There was the fault. But there, too, lies the hope; for in those unexplored mines, the submerged portions of our personalities, there still repose the stones and metals waiting to be mined and quarried and wrought into a nobler, worthier structure. And it is worth remembering that even ordinary faculties can achieve far more than they commonly do if the will is there, the drawing power of a great decision, the urge of God. It may be only Stevenson's excessive modesty, but at any rate this is his own testimony, spontaneously given: 'I frankly believe,' he writes, 'thanks to my dire industry, I have done more with smaller gifts than almost any man of letters in the world.'

(2) Believing in our own potentialities, we should not wait for a happy accident to bring out what is fine in us, for the happy accident may not arrive. Some people try to banish their other self, the reproachful vision of what God intended them for; our business, on the contrary, is deliberately to evoke that vision, to compare with it what we are here and now, and to aim at becoming what the vision shadows forth, assured that we may do so. We know how a gardener deliberately produces finer blooms by substituting purposive selection for slower process of natural selection. Let us grow finer blooms of character, other selves, by the same process of deliberately selecting the finest among our numberless potentialities.

There is nothing in the least abstruse or mysterious about the process. That other self rises before us, unbidden perhaps, in some quiet hour, when, in William Watson's sonorous lines—

> All we were in all men's sight
> Shares the erasure of the day—

and it tells us that that day itself has flown for us unprofitably, its hours frittered away; it tells us, this intangible visitor, of one who might have used the same gift of time to so much happier, healthier purpose, one who could by his labour have added something, some real quota, however small, to the world's assets; who would have seized this or that opportunity of closing a wound, rendering a service, easing a burden; who would have resisted this temptation, restrained his impatience, kept back that unkindly word, now spoken and beyond power of recall. A very commonplace experience, surely, but one which is at once a challenge and a promise; a promise which it rests with us to fulfil next day and the days following. This other self may not be realized in any startling, catastrophic manner; but if we listen to its plea, its petition to be born—it will struggle into being, it will take on flesh and blood, *our* flesh and *our* blood.

What we suffer from, and suffer for, is our lack of faith, faith in our own endowments. There is no belief more necessary for us to hold and act upon than the belief that we can be different; only, it is not enough to wish it—we must will it. This is the soul's true quest—to make itself more like what it desires to be.

¶ Tchekov tells us that he, for one, had a long and exhausting struggle; that he started a very ordinary boy, but set himself with obstinacy to make a man out of that soft slush of a nature, and those unpromising circumstances; as he puts it grimly, 'to squeeze the slave out of himself drop by drop.' And that persistent slave returned so often and disheartenningly, showed through so plainly time on time, do what he could. Yet he stood to his purpose, and would not accept defeat, and

[1] Elinor Mordaunt, *The Dark Fire.*

at long last a day did come, 'a beautiful morning when he felt that he had no longer a slave's blood in his veins, but a real man's.' [1]

Well, let me sin, but not with my consenting:
Well, let me die, but willing to be whole:
Never, O Christ, so stay me from relenting,
Shall there be truce betwixt my flesh and soul.

And that other self, beckoning, pleading, rebuking, urging, is none else but Christ, even He who transformed Saul into Paul. To call attention to that insistent vision is to exclaim with the poet, 'See the Christ stand!' For this Ideal Self tells us that we are related to another, higher order of realities than our senses inform us of; it suffers us not to rest until we acknowledge our kinship with God, and have entered into communion with His Holy Spirit. This, which we have felt in our most consecrated hours, this inability to be satisfied with what eye hath seen or ear heard, is the ultimate call of that Other Self, of 'Christ in us, the hope of glory.'

The Second Chance

Acts xiii. 13.—'John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.'

Acts xv. 37, 38.—'And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.'

2 Tim. v. 11.—'Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.'

On the shore of the Bay of Naples, north of Pozzuoli, there is a ruined temple of Serapis. Only three columns survive, but they have one striking and significant characteristic. For about nine feet the marble is perforated by the borings of a marine bivalve, which can still be traced within the holes drilled into the stone. According to geologists, the reason why such marks of the sea appear on pillars which stand well above the present level of the Mediterranean is that since the erection of the temple, over twenty centuries ago, the land must have sunk at some period, submerging the pillars to the depth of about twenty feet, and exposing them for a prolonged period to the ravages of the salt water. Thereafter the land must have again risen by another geological upheaval. What the modern traveller reads on the pierced surface of the columns, therefore, is the record of a subsidence and an elevation which otherwise he might never have suspected.

In the story of St Mark we have the record of an equally striking fall and rise within the world of human character. John Mark, at an early period of his life, broke down. He made a bad start in the service of the Church. He failed at a critical moment and withdrew from the Christian mission. But evidently he had recovered himself. Sixteen years lie between the earlier failure and the hour when Paul finally restored him to favour. As with the Italian temple, so with John Mark: the fall was followed by a return to the light and air of the original position.

1. John Mark is spoken of as 'the cousin' of Barnabas, and, as Barnabas was born in Cyprus, Mark may have been a native of the same island. But when introduced to us in the Acts he is resident in Jerusalem, in the home of his mother Mary, a wealthy and prominent member of the local church whose house was a centre for the leaders and disciples of the new faith. The name of Mark appears for the first time in connection with the visit of Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem. They had journeyed to Jerusalem to present the contribution of the Christians at Antioch on behalf of the poor; and here they found Mark lending a helping hand in the distribution of the Poor Fund. At the close of this visit it seemed to Barnabas that Mark might be equally serviceable to them in Antioch; so he brought his cousin away with them.

In Antioch Mark proved equally helpful; and, when the Church determined to send Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey, Barnabas proposed that Mark should go with them. All went well during this visit to Cyprus. Beginning at Salamis in the east, the missionaries traversed the whole length of the island to Paphos in the west. At the close of their work in Paphos they crossed, by ship, to Pamphylia in Asia Minor. And it was here that John Mark deserted the work, and returned to Jerusalem. The reason for his desertion is not given. It may have been that the prospect of risky work in the interior of the country

[1] A. J. Gossip, *From the Edge of the Crowd*, 232.

frightened the youth. Either for this reason or because he found his duties too exacting 'he departed from them,' leaving Paul and Barnabas at a time when his help was most urgently needed.

¶ Life is too great for us or too petty. . . . We must die daily on the levels of ignoble compromise or perish tragically among the precipices. On the one hand is a life—unsatisfying and secure, a plane of dulled gratifications, mean advantages, petty triumphs, adaptations, acquiescences and submissions—and on the other a steep and terrible climb, set with sharp stones and bramble thickets.[1]

2. This evidence of Mark's unreliable character made a painful impression on Paul's mind, which it took years to erase. For a long time he refused to have anything to do with the recreant. Mark must have felt this coolness, all the more so that he was secretly conscious of having deserved it. But during the interval of probation he was not idle, and his behaviour throws a good deal of light upon the stuff of which he was made. For it is true that what proves the ruin of some men is not so much their actual sins or errors as the way in which they conduct themselves after the lapse. When it is brought home to them that other people disapprove of their actions, they may turn defiant, arguing cavalierly that too much is being made of the matter. They may condone their offence or try to laugh it off. Mark plainly was too sound for that kind of behaviour. His temptation was probably not defiance but despair. He belonged to the sensitive class of people who will brood unduly over the past, till they are apt to feel that they cannot hope to live down a scandal or to retrieve a false and hasty step. They blame themselves so acutely for the moment's lapse that they scarcely venture to expect that other people will ever overlook what they have done. When a second opportunity of service presents itself, will not the old affair be brought up against them? Is not the record spoiled? Is there any use of trying to serve in the ranks again?

Yet it is our duty to accept, and even to look out for, occasions of proving our better purposes. The duty is not easy. Before any temptation we manage to persuade ourselves that yielding to it will not make any serious difference, and that we can afford to indulge ourselves with some impunity. But after the false step has been taken there is a danger of collapsing into the fear that we have gone too far ever to retrace our steps. In the one case we minimise the effect, in the other we exaggerate it, and there is a real risk of becoming listless, as though the mainspring of life were broken. Mark took a braver and a more healthy view of life than that. The inner history of his repentance is unwritten, but from its results we can judge that he honestly tried to rise on the stepping-stones of his dead past to higher things. That was a true word of Luther, though it sounds almost like a paradox: 'If thou wilt confess sin, then have a care that thou lookest and thinkest far more on thy future life than on thy past.' Confession does force us to weigh what we have done, but once the past has been honestly faced, it must not be suffered to engross or depress us. Confession puts a man on his feet again, that he may try to do better, and the genuine penitent turns to the future, knowing that he has not yet forfeited a career of some usefulness to God and man.

¶ Some men have even made their future out of failure. Could anything seem more hopeless than to be a convicted forger, to be torn from wife and children and sent to penal servitude? Yet a man redeemed that black episode in his life. He wrote a book called *Five Years of Penal Servitude*, which contained, not the expression of regret for the past and recognition of the justice of his sentence, but certain hints of how to make prison life more beneficial to the criminal in a moral sense and less savage in some of its aspects. The man was asked to come and help to carry out his reforms. He even became a prominent prison official, and doubtless many a poor hardened wretch would feel there was a strange note of sympathy in the words of that official and know how past experiences of punishment had produced softening.[1]

Build on resolve, and not upon regret,
The structure of thy future. Do not grope
Among the shadows of old sins, but let
Thine own soul's light shine on the path of hope
And dissipate the darkness. Moist no tears
Upon the blotted record of lost years,
But turn the leaf, and smile, oh, smile to see
The fair white pages that remain for thee.[2]

[1] H. G. Wells.

[1] F. Hastings. [2] Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

3. Five or six years after his act of moral cowardice Mark had recovered his nerve and came forward to rejoin the fighting line. Having secured the forgiveness of God, he set himself pluckily to earn the forgiveness and respect of those whom he had disappointed. This time the venture seems to have proved quite a success. Mark rehabilitated his character. He showed that he had outgrown the weakness of his earlier years, and the confidence which he had slowly learned to place in his own powers was justified. Peter welcomed him; his cousin Barnabas held out an encouraging hand to him; but he had still to win Paul's regard, and that took longer. Paul was one of those heroic natures who can more easily forgive a personal wrong than any disloyalty to principle or flinching before danger. In his intense jealousy for the honour of the Christian cause and ministry, he could not bear to have it discredited or endangered by treachery.

But as the years passed the Apostle kept his eye on the young man and saw that his reform was genuine. So far had he recaptured Paul's confidence, and made himself indispensable by service and sweetness, that the lonely Apostle, with the headsman's sword in prospect, feels that he would like to have him at hand once more, and bids Timothy bring Mark with him, 'for he is profitable to me for the ministry.' This verdict marks the final reinstatement of the younger man.

(1) There is guidance here for those who have to *give* the second chance in life. Once we are reasonably sure that a man has a genuine sense of his error and is doing his best to retrieve the position, it is our moral duty to make him feel that he has our profound encouragement and sympathy. He cannot be left alone to work his way back. The Christian office is to add our trust to his. Failures are sometimes due to a passing fault or to a defect which may be outgrown. It is not fair to make a single moral lapse invariably an index to real character, especially when it occurs in a man's younger and impulsive days. Let us bear that in mind; and this too, that there is such a thing as the power of rebound in our moral nature. The effect of a fall on some people is to produce a reaction of the whole moral life against itself. Instead of stunning the soul, it stirs every faculty into a hot effort to rise and redeem one's character. Now, while discipline is discipline, while men are obliged to protect themselves and their cause against imposture, we ought, in all fairness, to keep on the outlook for any marks of this recovery in a person who has disappointed us, and to credit him with it as soon as possible.

¶ Tennyson sketches such treatment of a young life in his description of how King Arthur generously reinstated Edyrn, the wild young knight.

> Have ye look'd
> At Edyrn? have ye seen how nobly changed?
> This work of his is great and wonderful.
> His very face with change of heart is changed.
> The world will not believe a man repents:
> And this wise world of ours is mainly right.
> Full seldom doth a man repent, or use
> Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch
> Of blood and custom wholly out of him,
> And make all clean, and plant himself afresh.
> Edyrn has done it, weeding all his heart
> As I will weed this land before I go.
> I, therefore, made him of our Table Round,
> Not rashly, but have proved him every-way
> One of our noblest, our most valorous,
> Sanest and most obedient.

(2) And now for those who have to *get* the second chance. Think again of that Italian temple. When it sank under the sea, till the ravages of marine creatures ate into the pure marble and the foul tangle gathered round its pillars, there was a force left in the world ready to raise it again into the sunlight. Is there not something corresponding to that power within the moral sphere? A lapse seems to leave us a prey to low and dark things which eat away our strength and disfigure the comeliness of the human soul. It appears as though we had fallen hopelessly out of the clean, bright world, and disqualified ourselves for any effective service there. But a lifting power comes into play, and we must believe in it, we must have faith in the redeeming energy of God's faith in us. That power of God raises us by assuring us of His mercy, by restoring our self-respect, and by gathering round us slowly the trust of our fellow-men, until we are able to take our place in the upper, open air again. It is true that the second chance is never quite so rich and fresh as the first chance. A tinge of regret will always cling to a life

which has missed the glow and vigour that lie in clean beginnings and early opportunities of social and religious usefulness. But, while there is that sense of a break or blot, the second chance is a great chance. It restores our vitality; it enables us to wipe out much of the past; it means that we still count for something among men and before God. And, as surely as God is God, if we repent honestly we shall get this second chance.

To Mark the second place; that Mark who erst
Was kin to Barnabas and friend of Paul,
And reckoned it an easy thing and small
To be their yoke-fellow through lands accurst,
Preaching deliverance to the tribes dispersed;
Yea, and was helpful ere his faith had fall;
Then taking fearfulness for Heaven's recall,
Went back and walked not with them as at first;
And so was lost to Paul, but not to God;
Who bore him gently as a tender child,
Strengthened and blest him; till with feet newshod
Again he ventured on the pagan wild,
Carried the Light of lights from shade to shade,
Travailed, and suffered, and was not afraid.[1]

David

Acts xiii. 36.—'David . . . served his own generation by the will of God.'

There is nothing so lovely, nothing so happy, as right living—and nothing so difficult. The Christian truth about life is that it is service; and there is no greater proof of the power of Christ than this—that this view of life has prevailed against all others. Christ has won the victory for this nobler philosophy of life. True, men are selfish and slow to practise it; but in presence of it they are ashamed of their selfishness. They cannot make a decent theory of life out of their cold-blooded selfishness; and for very shame they are forced to say it after Him—Life is service.

But we often forget that this is what Christ means when He says it—the service of God more than the service of man. It is a very shallow way of reading Christ's words to fancy that, when He speaks of service, He means just what we have in the Good Samaritan. Of course it means that; but it means far more than that. There is a First Commandment which is always first—'Thou shalt love God' and serve Him.

When we attempt to make morality without God, and to keep up service as a thing between man and man without Divine sanctions, we are building on sand; and the confusions of society soon prove it. There is nothing between man and man to constitute this relation, only between God and man. When Christ says 'servants' there is a sound theory of life in the word, because behind it there is nothing less than the existence of God. Why am I here, and why am I thus—such a man in such a world at such a time? If we believe in God, the answer must be this: His love gave me my being, and I am His, and Him I serve, and by His will I live. We are servants of God.

But of course it is abundantly true that the service of God is the service of man. So it works itself out. If we can find out what God lives for, then we can determine, too, what human life is for; for His purposes are ours, if we are His servants. And this is what God lives for—for the good of all He loves. God's life is ceaseless service. When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, there at the lowliest He is most Godlike. God's angels are all ministering spirits; and all God's worlds are built for service. The constitution of Nature is not organized selfishness; it is the perfection of harmonious ministry. And for us this is Divine service—when we fall in with God's kind ways in God's needy world.

¶ When Avicenna sent his soul on its bold journey through the other worlds, he was told that he would know that he was nearing God when he found himself among beings who serve day and night without ever a wish to rest; and that, though God is really so unlike our human conceptions of Him that he might blunder into His presence and not recognize Him, he could infallibly know Him by this: Don't look for thrones and splendours, but when you come on One without a thought of self, spending His whole life for others, in lowly and humble and unwearied kindness, down on your face in worship, because that is God![1]

Here in our text are these two; 'His own generation by the will of God.' God and our

[1] E. C. Lefroy, *Sonnets*.

[1] A. J. Gossip, *The Galilean Accent*, 272.

generation—we want to feel this about our life. In school or college, in the office or the market, when clients or customers come in about us, or friends and neighbours, it is our own generation. It is there that we touch our generation, and the point of contact is the place of service. Even there, if we can keep away from us the fatal influence of mere selfishness and greed, if we can see a nobler meaning in our work, if we do it in the spirit of Christ—even there, as we serve our generation, it is God's will that is done.

The best I can
For the great world is just the best I can
For this my world.[1]

Now, if we look at David's life, we shall see how his work is done—with the shepherd's crook and the chieftain's sword and the king's sceptre and the minstrel's harp.

1. *The Shepherd.*—David begins his life humbly, as many a great and useful life has been begun, in the fields. Out from the little village in Judæa on the edge of the wilderness, guarding a few sheep, leading them forth in the morning, finding for them grass and water, and folding them safely at night, a brave, healthy, hardy boy, with his leathern sling at his waist, and his shepherd's staff in his hand, and his rude harp—this is David, happy as the day is long, and useful and content.

It is the lesson we find so often in the Bible, of the dignity and the worth and the wide-reaching influence of honest work, however humble it may be. David kept his few sheep in the wilderness; and so he served his generation. What the world wanted from David just then was to be a good shepherd. Every man who shirks his work, every bit of bad work, impoverishes the world, and lowers and degrades the whole of human life. Every bit of honest, useful, excellent work increases the world's wealth; and every man who puts character into his work adds something to the sum of goodness in the world. He makes it easier for all the rest to be good and faithful too. He lifts a little higher the standard of living among men.

¶ My share in the work of the world may be limited, but the fact that it is work makes it precious. . . . Darwin could work only half an hour at a time; yet in many diligent half-hours he laid anew the foundations of philosophy. . . . Green the historian tells us that the world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.[1]

¶ Every piece of work which is not as good as you can make it, which you have palmed off imperfect, meagrely thought, niggardly in execution, upon mankind, who is your paymaster on parole, and in a sense your pupil, every hasty or slovenly or untrue performance, should rise up against you in the court of your own heart and condemn you for a thief.[2]

¶ Mr Grayson tells us of a village carpenter who kept adding touch to touch at part of a bit of furniture completely hidden. 'Why do you bother so?' they asked, 'no one will ever know.' 'I will know,' the man answered. 'And God too knows.'

2. *The Outlaw.*—But the happy life of Bethlehem is soon broken up, and David goes out into the great world with its courts and camps. After a brief time in the favour of Saul, the scene changes suddenly again to the desert, where he is 'hunted like a partridge upon the mountains,' a fugitive, a freebooter. See him in the wilderness, the same wilderness into which he had often ventured seeking the sheep that had strayed, himself now hunted like a beast across its barren hills. See him in the rocky hold of Adullam, with his wild, devoted band, strong and swift, frank and bold, prudent and patient and modest—a born leader of men.

Now he was David the outlaw, but still he served his generation. Here are the two men, the two kings in Israel—the one with his ruddy beauty and bright eyes and lithe form, and the other gaunt and haggard, his giant strength weakened, and his goodly face seamed and seared, writhing in the grip of his evil spirit. David was driven out into the desert, haunted by the mad king; but the cause of God in Israel was not centred in the palace at Gibeah—it was bound up with the fortunes of the exile and the outlaw.

The service which God wants, and our generation needs, may often be this—to go into opposition, to protest, to resist and oppose, even to suffer. There are times when the

[1] George Macdonald.

[1] Helen Keller. [2] R. L. Stevenson.

country can be saved only by a loud protest. And though the man who makes it be driven out and persecuted, still this may be his noble service to his time. We are the disciples of a Crucified Lord. The world gave Him a cross, and if we stand beside Him we shall always have the world against us. In the world, as the Apostles saw it, there are clear lines between the kingdoms of light and darkness, and across that frontier there is ever the noise of battle. And if we live in our generation by the will of God we shall find that we must protest even though we be hated for it.

¶ For his efforts on behalf of the Ten-Hour Bill, J. R. Stephens, a Wesleyan minister, was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment. Oastler, another champion of oppressed men and women in the factories of that day, found his way into Fleet Prison. These men were seeking to release children who began to work in the pitch darkness of coal mines underground when they were five years old and laboured from six in the morning to eight at night. During this period Lord Brougham had stood up in Parliament and condemned the reform bills as 'contrary to the order of Nature and of Providence,' calling Shaftesbury, Stephens, Oastler, and others fighting for a decent economic order 'the advocates of a misplaced and perverted humanity.' [1]

3. *The King.*—One more swift change, and David is on the throne. And still he 'served his generation.' When the shepherd became the sovereign, he was a shepherd still, the shepherd of Israel, the servant of his people.

How near this comes to the mind of Christ! The master is the minister. This serving-man was a king. Girt with all the authority of power, and gifted with all the resources of genius, and housed amid the wealth and luxury of royal state, this man served. Is it not the lesson of Christ Himself? 'He that is greatest among you, let him be the servant.' Whatever our station, we cannot escape the obligation to serve. Rather it comes upon us more and more the higher we go. The obligation of service expands with the increase of our possessions and opportunities; and where much is given, much is required. The king owes to his subject a larger loyalty than the subject to his king; and the master is a greater debtor to his servant than the servant to his master. And the bulk of the service is to be rendered not by the weak and the needy, but by the exalted and the competent.

¶ In the opening chapters of her *Life of the Duchess of York*, Lady Cynthia Asquith writes: 'The fact that she has given such enduring satisfaction and, in so doing, become one of the delights of our country and its dominions, testifies to much more than her undeniable natural advantages.

'Beauty and charm of manner provide an excellent introduction, but for the difficult position she was entering, qualities even rarer than these were required. It was necessary for her to show an intelligent understanding of what may be called the profession of being royal: to realize that she was undertaking a strenuous task, not merely gracing a feudal formality.

'With her marriage she entered the service of the country, and in that service she has never faltered or frowned. That high sense of obligation, for which the mother, to whom she is so devoted a daughter, sets a shining example, not only makes it impossible for her to shirk any duty, however onerous, but—what is far rarer—enables her by the alchemy of a happy nature to turn duties into delights.' [1]

4. *The Singer.*—It adds a peculiar charm to David's life when we think of him as a minstrel-hero, soldier, and singer. When he lays aside the sword, he takes the harp. When the battle is over, there is banquet and song. No doubt it came to him in his earliest days. As day by day he went forth to the fields, he beguiled his time with some rude instrument, waking the echoes of the solitudes with the melodies he loved. He took it with him to the palace. He came like a sunbeam into the darkness where Saul wrestled with his misery. When the moody madness was upon the king, David's harp could work wonders.

God sent His singers upon earth,
With songs of sadness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men
And bring them back to heaven again.

Happy they who have this gift, and who know to what high and holy ends it may be used.

[1] G. Stewart, *The Crucifixion in our Street*, 147.

[1] *Woman's Journal*, Nov. 1927.

There is no brighter, sweeter service than that of those who bring music into life and chase away its sadness.

So David served his generation. You remember the familiar saying of a famous Scotsman—'Let me make the songs of a people, and I care not who makes their laws.' Yes, and to make the hymns is better than to write the creeds. Try to think of the history of a hymn or of a Psalm, like the Twenty-third or the Fifty-first. Where has it been and what has it done? Who can tell the story, the service to the generations? To give to the dumb spirit speech before God, to express for us the thoughts and emotions we cannot utter, the sense of sin, the tender trust in God, the doubt and fear, and hope and gladness, to come to us with a message of peace set to sweetest music—surely this is the noblest service ever permitted to mortal man to render to his kind.

Not many of us, perhaps, can make such messages; but we can repeat the gracious words that others give us. Some of us can sing them; some of us can speak them. It is the same service—to give a word in season to him that is weary. It is the ministry Christ asks us to fulfil, like giving a cup of cold water to a thirsty soul.

Can Sin be Forgiven?

Acts xiii. 38.—'Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.'

The forgiveness of sins has a place in all the creeds. It is not only an article of faith, it is a fact of experience. The consciousness of the Church is the consciousness of sins forgiven. As Luther put it, the Church is full of the forgiveness of sins; it is a community of forgiven men.

The forgiveness of sins is a fact of experience, and in that sense unquestionable. Perhaps we see it most distinctly in the Old Testament, because a vaster range of time is covered there, and there are more experiences and less of systematic reflection. We cannot help feeling that, alike in the historical books of the Old Testament and in the devotional books, forgiveness is, if we may put it so, taken for granted. Not that it is ever regarded as a trifle, which one may take for granted; the very reverse is the case. The wonder of it recurs perpetually; it is the inspiration of the profoundest adoration, the most deeply-felt praise; it is in the sense of it that men own the incomparableness of the God who wins and holds their hearts. It never occurred to anyone that the idea of pardon was self-contradictory, or impossible, or immoral. They were not deluded by abstract ideas. When they sinned, they knew that they sinned against God; they knew that His anger was kindled, and that He hid His face from them. But they knew that many a time He turned His anger away. They knew that He made His face to shine upon them. They knew that all life changed under that brightness as the earth changes under the sun of spring. That was what they called forgiveness. It meant the coming of God again into a life from which He had been shut out.

¶ 'It was this,' says Bunyan, 'that would almost kill my heart: my sin was point-blank against my Saviour. My sin was bigger than the sins of a country, of a kingdom, or of the whole world. Not one of my sins was pardonable. No other sin could equal mine; mine outwent them every one. I found it in my mind to flee from God, as from the face of a dreadful Judge; yet this was my torment that I could not escape His hand! But, blessed be His grace, that Scripture, in these flying fits, would call, as running after me: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." This, I say, would come upon my mind when I was fleeing from the face of God. Indeed, it would make me stop, and, as it were, look over my shoulder behind me to see if I could discern that the God of grace did follow me with a pardon in His hand!'

1. Now forgiveness presents intellectual difficulties to those who do not think in this personal fashion of the relations of God and man, but dwell mentally in a world of abstract ideas and natural laws. In such a world sin is an action, an action which has initiated certain movements in the vast mechanism of Nature; and these movements must work themselves out to their inevitable issue. To speak of forgiveness in this connection is to speak of something which is shown to be unreal by the very fact that you cannot bring it into contact with reality. It is as futile as sympathy with a poor man which can do nothing for his relief. There are sins of

a sort which are easily tolerated or condoned. We hope, perhaps, to outgrow them. There are other sins, however, which are far more serious, even from this point of view. Men see that their sin has involved them in consequences which go far beyond themselves and their control. They are deeply conscious of what, from their own point of view, is irreparable and tragic in it. The best they can do is to brace themselves to a kind of stoical courage, and bear what they have brought upon themselves, or perhaps—which may be far harder—what they have brought upon others.

But the truth is that at this level we are not dealing with sin at all, and, therefore, none of the experiences which Scripture shows us as connected with it in human souls comes within our reach. Sin can be defined only in one way, namely, by relation to God; and till the relation to God comes into view it is impossible for us to understand either the realities or the possibilities which it involves. What is it that is violated by sin? Is it our own nature? Is it an abstract law which is embodied in the world? No; it is the will of the living God. When we sin we literally sin against something; there is something which resists in us, and we put our being into it, and our will. We spend force pushing aside something which resists us as we push, and that resisting something is not the mere conception of our duty, nor an abstract law, nor the constitution of things; it is the will of the living God. There is a curious kind of atheism in which many men are entangled here. Their sin is their own, they feel, and they are resolved to deal with it themselves. The responsibility is their own, and they will take it on their own shoulders. But to speak thus is wantonly to shut our eyes to the facts of the case. Our responsibility is our own, but it is a responsibility to God. It is this which makes it what it is, and it is only when we set it in this light that we can ask or answer any questions about it, that we can appreciate either its dimensions or its perils or its hopes.

2. Here, then, is the point to which we must bring our difficulties; here, in particular, is the light in which we must raise the question, Can sin be forgiven? Is it possible for a man to sin so deeply and so persistently that all hope is apparently taken away? Think, for example, of the ruin wrought by one bad book of genius, which is a kind of deathless sin, a fountain casting up its poisonous waters from generation to generation; or even by one foul jest which its wit has kept alive, and which has slain the innocence of thousands; think of a case like this, and can we speak of forgiveness in connection with it? Once we ask this question at the proper place, we see on what the answer depends. It depends on which of the two is greater—the living God, in whom all that world of Nature, in which sin reigns in death, nevertheless lives and moves and has its being, or the corruption, degradation, and despair that have been introduced into that world of Nature by the sin of man? Of course, if there is no living God, forgiveness is impossible, as impossible as sin itself. But, granting that the living God and the living soul are both present, the answer is not doubtful. There is forgiveness with God. Man cannot introduce into Nature any force which passes beyond His control. He can put right with Himself again the soul which has become most desperately wrong. The sin which has struck its roots deepest into Nature He can uproot. This is what forgiveness means, and there is forgiveness with Him.

Forgiveness is best understood by examples, and the supreme example of it in Scripture is the prodigal son. The prodigal son had sinned wantonly, ruinously. How easy it would have been, from the level of Nature and its inviolable laws, to preach to him the impossibility of forgiveness. Let him repent as sincerely and as bitterly as he might, what difference would that make to his dissipated fortune, his shattered health, his lost innocence, his forfeited hopes? None in the world. This is the style in which the wisdom brought by Nature speaks; it is also the style which is sometimes assumed by austere men, who seem to imagine that in indulging it they are acting as the guardians of morality and righteousness. But it is not the style of Jesus. Jesus remembers what all these people forget—that the prodigal son has a father. He remembers that the thought of the father can come into the prodigal's life as a new motive of immeasurable power. He remembers that when a son acts on the motive thus supplied, there cannot but be a response from the other side. That love of the father was pardoning love, and it is a picture of the love of God. Who will say that in any region of life it is an impotent and ineffective thing? It is the

most potent we know in the spiritual world. There is something healing and restorative in it that searches into the most sensitive places and the most benumbed—those that throb with pain, and those that are past feeling—and that has virtue in it to make all things new.

It is painfully true, of course, that there are things which do not pass—consequences of sin, and especially of the habit of sin, which no one is allowed to forget or to escape. But it is no part of the belief in forgiveness, or of the experience of it, to deny this. There are consequences of sin, both bodily and spiritual effects of it on the physique, the imagination, the emotions, the capacity for particular kinds of service, that do not disappear with reconciliation. But, with all his disabilities pressing in him, with his future apparently mortgaged to the past, the man to whom the forgiving love of the Father has come may be as sure of it as the prodigal of his father's love. And in that Divine love, that is, love transcending Nature and its laws and using them, he has the assurance that these disabilities are not eternal, and that meanwhile they are for his good.

3. Forgiveness, then, is possible if we have a heavenly Father, and if sin is sin against Him. It is possible, but is it easy? This is not the teaching of the New Testament or of the creed. It is possible only because God is love, and asserts His love as the last reality in the universe in face of and above the tragic reality of sin. There is a stage in human experience at which we think sin is the last reality. The evil things we have done, the weight of them on our conscience, the consequences of them in our lives, their incalculable, far-reaching, uncontrollable influence on the lives of others—these are the realities which we encounter everywhere, and from which we cannot get away. They are like an iron cage in which we have shut ourselves. But in point of fact—real as these things are—they are not the ultimate reality of the universe. That transcendent and ultimate reality that brings hope to despair is the love of God.

If the question is raised, How do we know that God is love? the answer is, We know it in Christ. Even when He lived on earth, Christ imparted to men somehow His own conviction of the Father's love and forgiveness. He did it by explicit teaching. He did it by Himself exercising the prerogative of pardon, and exercising it with power. Christ convinced men, too, of the reality of forgiveness by His attitude to those who wronged Him personally. When He turned in the judgment hall and looked upon Peter, and caught him on the edge of the precipice over which Judas fell, or when He prayed on the Cross, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,' when He came back from death and stood in the midst of the men who had all forsaken him and fled, and said, 'Peace be unto you,' forgiveness, if we may say so, was present and incarnate in Him.

It is in the company of Jesus that we learn the reality and the possibility of pardon; and we learn this, also, if we learn anything, that the forgiveness of which we are assured in Christ is forgiveness that has come to us at a great cost. Now, it is this cost of forgiveness, this passion in the love of God, this tragic element in redemption, to which theologians from St Paul down have sought to give expression in their doctrines of atonement. A doctrine of atonement is a doctrine of the cost of forgiveness to God. Who does not feel that a cheap forgiveness—a forgiveness which costs God nothing—and which really means that sin is nothing to Him, is itself a kind of moral horror? There are no words in the world that bring home to us the cost of forgiveness like the New Testament words about the death of Jesus. 'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.' 'When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.' 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' These are the words that make forgiveness credible, because they make it great.

¶ Bernard Shaw stated a truth known and read of all responsive men and women when he put these words upon the lips of Joan the Maid when she was baited and frustrated by the dignitaries of Church and State: 'If I go through the fire I shall go to the hearts of the people.' Man's persuasions and explanations and devices may fail, but the love shown forth on Golgotha is understandable to the simplest heart.[1]

[1] G. Stewart, *The Crucifixion in our Street*, 131.

The Incarnation

Acts xiv. 11.—'The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.'

When the simple folk of Lystra were confronted with a beneficent healing power transcending ordinary experience, they were prepared to believe that 'the gods had come down to them in the likeness of men.' Many an English traveller among rude people has been similarly honoured. And in Lycaonia the Apostles were close upon places that were celebrated in Greek mythology as having witnessed the very two gods here spoken of wandering among the shepherds and entertained with modest hospitality in their huts.

The incident is a striking and picturesque one. The people standing round, the sudden flash of awe and yet of gladness which ran through them, the tumultuous outcry which was unintelligible to the Apostles till it was interpreted by the appearance of the priest of Jupiter with oxen and garlands for offerings, the glimpse of the two Apostles—the older, graver, venerable Barnabas, the younger, more active, eloquent Paul, whom their imaginations converted into the Father of gods and men, and the herald Mercury, who were already associated in local legends.

This joyful outburst of the people of Lycaonia gives utterance to one of the most striking and universal convictions of heathenism, and stands in very close and intimate relations with that greatest of all facts in the history of the world, the Incarnation of the Eternal Word. That the gods came down in the likeness of men is the dream of heathenism. 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us' is the sober truth which meets and vindicates and transcends that cry.

1. *The Heathen Idea of Incarnation.*—In all lands gods in human form have been believed in. Even fetishism and the lowest forms of idolatry ascribe such human traits to the objects of worship—coarse lusts and vindictive wrath—as are prevalent among the worshippers. The Greeks, whose poetic and æsthetic culture is the wonder and glory of the ages, were not a virtuous or a virtue-loving people, and their mythology, incomparably beautiful in its kind, is utterly lacking in the beauty of holiness, because there was none of it in the typical men and women after whose likeness their gods were shaped. Rome in her earlier days had a purer morality, and therefore her gods were more decent than the corresponding deities of Greece. But her gods were genuine Romans. In studying the character of the elder Cato, who in his time was regarded as a man of unsurpassed excellence, there was not one of the Beatitudes in which he, the best of the Romans, could have claimed a part; and there is none of the Roman divinities who possessed any one of these virtues. The Hebrews had a higher conception of God than any other pre-Christian people, and they had a larger measure of Divine inspiration than the rest of the ancient world. But their greatest and best men often manifested a fierce integrity, a merciless righteousness, a vindictive patriotism. The majesty of a lowly spirit, the magnanimity of forbearance, the nobleness of service were not recognized till the coming of Him who reversed the moral scale, and gave supremacy to qualities which before were, like Himself, 'despised and rejected of men.'

Do these facts mean anything to us? Are we to dismiss them as simply the products of a stage which we have left far behind, and to plume ourselves that we have passed out of the twilight?

Even if we listen to what comparative mythology has to say, the tendency to shape legends of the earthly appearance of the gods still remains to be accounted for; and we shall have to admit that, while they belong to an early stage of the world's progress, the feelings which they express belong to all stages of it.

The human heart has ever craved for and strained after personal intercourse with the unthinkable intelligence from which it was derived; and, inasmuch as finite minds become bewildered in the endeavour to grasp and measure the Infinite, this universal God-necessity has always formulated itself in some conception of 'gods coming down in the likeness of men.'

¶ Professor Max Müller, in his lectures on the science of religion, has said: 'Man has always wearied for one upon whom he can rest, and you can no more explain this soul-hunger than you can explain the hunger-and-thirst instinct implanted in the new-born child.'

¶ When Kingsley was passing through Deism to Christianity he wrote: 'The one solution of all my doubts and fears for all Heaven and earth is the Incarnation. It must either have happened somewhere else or will happen somewhere, some day; so utterly do both my reason and my conscience, and, as I think, judging from history, the reason and conscience of the many in all ages and climes demand an Incarnation.'[1]

2. *The Master-Truth of Christianity.*—God has come down to us in the likeness of man. It is impossible not to notice in the teaching of the many helpful, illuminating schools of thought of our day a certain tendency to belittle, to depreciate, the wholly unique position of the Lord Jesus, the objective Christ. It arises no doubt from a laudable desire to break down limitations and see the Incarnation as an inclusive fact. It is well that these teachers should emphasize the inseparability of God and man. It is well for them to reiterate that 'As He is so are we in this world.' It is well to be assured that God is in man as man's true life and real being. It is, however, essential to remember and affirm that God is in Christ in a far more individual sense than that which is implied by His Immanence in humanity. God was in Christ in such perfect identification that of Him alone it can be said: 'God has come down to us in the likeness of man.' When, therefore, God would fully realize Himself, would manifest what He is in Himself, it is in a man, a member of the human race, that the supreme self-realization takes place; but a man in whom the Divine nature and the human nature were, purposely, so completely at-one-d, from the very beginning, that He was a perfect manifestation of God. So Jesus, born at Bethlehem, means God accessible, understandable, no longer an unthinkable Omnipresence, but 'manifest in the flesh.' Not summoning a guilty world to bring spotlessness as a peace-offering to some distant throne, but coming 'out of the everywhere into here' to bring His spotlessness down to redeem, sanctify, and bless the world.

¶ It is related of a celebrated musician that, when asked to compose a National Anthem for the people of another country, he went and lived with them, studied them from within, shared their poverty, became one *with* them that he might become one *of* them, and was thus, and only thus, enabled to express their feelings in his music. This is what God did at the Incarnation.[1]

It is no detriment to the power of this truth that we cannot arrive at its precise method by a process of natural reasoning. We are the children of mystery ourselves. We cannot tell how spirit and matter blend, and we are in the midst of mysteries in Nature and in ourselves as great as any in revelation. What, for example, is consciousness? Professor Tyndal says that 'the mode of connexion between the changing atoms of the brain and the consciousness of personal identity must be utterly and for ever inconceivable.' It may be so, but the phenomenon expressed by the words is none the less true to experience. 'Great is the mystery,' says St Paul, 'God was manifest in the flesh.' We shall never know in this life all that we are uttering when we speak that name of limitless significance, 'Jesus.' It is Divine Love coming personally into our midst. It gives us by anticipation a great claim when we shall see Him as King of Paradise.

¶ When the centenary of Stephenson, the great engineer, was celebrated at Newcastle-on-Tyne, amidst the processions, bands, and surging crowds a little company of working men was observed carrying a banner on which was inscribed the motto, 'He was one of us.' They came from the village where Stephenson was born; they were proudly conscious of a separateness, a reflected lustre, and a special position in that commemoration. 'He was born in our little planet'—He is 'Immanuel, God with us.'

It is twenty centuries since the first Christmas Day, and the thought that suggests itself is how greatly God must love us to come down to us in the likeness of man! We are assured that our whole being is fringed on every side with Fatherliness indescribable; our little lives, which sometimes seem so stricken, so abandoned, so tried, are virtually floating in an ocean of unfathomable love. When the smart and trial of educative affliction are upon us, we hear the whisper, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.' The same implicit trust in the invisible presence of the Divine Friend should cure us of undue anxiety as to the future. 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart' when the

[1] *Life of Charles Kingsley*, i. 378.

[1] E. E. Holmes.

outlook of life seems hopeless. Men trust in the inevitable sequence of ascertained natural laws.

¶ On the day of Queen Victoria's first Jubilee large sums had been paid for seats in barges moored alongside the Thames Embankment where the procession was to pass. When the spectators took their places, these barges were six feet below the level of the road, and nothing was visible but the dripping granite wall; from an ordinary human point of view the outlook was hopeless. But no disappointment or anxiety was manifested; why not? The spectators trusted completely in the unerring laws that govern natural phenomena. They knew the tide would rise and lift them to a level with the road before the procession passed.

It is hardly necessary to say that the first practical test of our union with Christ will be a Christ-like attitude towards others, especially towards our needy and suffering brethren in humanity. The first act of adoration of the Babe of Bethlehem was giving: 'they presented unto him gifts.' There is much distress to-day among the overcrowded, the suffering, the unemployed poor of this country. A considerable proportion of the poverty is chronic and calls for patient, philanthropic, reforming labour among the springs of national life, that its causes may be lessened; it is essentially the work of Christians to undertake this, to strike out new and nobler plans, and to strive to depose ignorance and intemperance.

Then the Christmas obligation upon us all to throw our personal influence into the spirit of the anthem of the Nativity, 'Peace on earth,' is emphatic and binding. What do the angels think when they look around Christian Europe to-day and remember the words they chanted to the shepherds. Millions of armed men await some trivial international misunderstanding to plunge the world into all the horrors of another war. Divisions, heart-burnings, suspicions, rend the Church of Christ, and divide Christian from Christian. Misunderstandings, jealousies, irritabilities, mar the beauty of home life, and keep asunder members of the same family. All this is thwarting the Divine purpose, and grieving God's holy Spirit. What beatitude can be more Christ-like or more appropriate to the Christmas season than the blessing of the Peacemaker? Inasmuch as God is Love and desires to express love through us, no action will bring more joy to our own hearts than promoting peace.

THE WITNESS OF GOD

Acts xiv. 15-18.—'He did not leave himself without a witness.'

I

Introduction

Among the religious ideas of Acts, its apologetic or propaganda is of the first importance if we are to understand how Christianity made its way in a varied world of men and religions. On what persuasions, we ask, did the missionaries of the Faith rely for carrying conviction both to the Synagogue and to the Market Place, and so gain a verdict for Christ? And this is not merely an old world question, because, for the uses of the modern Church at home and abroad, we have to learn from the apologetic of Acts methods of approach which are simply invaluable.

It has sometimes been said that the once persuasive evangelistic mission is to-day ineffective and worked out. But the fault seems to lie, as missions in the industrial and mining centres have shown, not in the Evangel itself, but in the presentation of it. Each man has to hear in his own tongue the wonderful words of life. Every generation demands its own apologetic, and God fulfils Himself in many ways. This is made evident in Acts and in the missionary methods by which the Empire was won. To the Jew Paul became a Jew, arguing with them, we are told, from their own Scriptures and on the accepted facts of Judaism, as he did in the mission to Pisidian Antioch (Acts xiii.). But he had also a Gentile apologetic, which varied with time and circumstance,

as at Lystra, Athens, or before the governors Felix and Festus. To this we may add 1 Thessalonians, which is a simple and childlike Christian primer. But the object is one and the same in every place—to plant conviction in the heart. Though the Apostle travelled to his goal in varied ways, his great discourses show his plan; and they are significant not only for the pure milk of the Word, but for the vessel in which in each case it is offered. He spoke to the needs of the situation, and to the moral and even the intellectual attainments of his audience; so both the wise and the unwise were persuaded and edified. Luther tells us how he preached in familiar words and half-words to the housemaids in the gallery in a dialect that found their ear. So did Paul, for he was not the kind of man who preaches to prisoners on the dangers of unrestricted liberty!

In the present study we propose to examine Paul's method of approach and his gospel to a rural and primitive audience. One side of this is found in the remarkable address to the people of Lystra.

The town was a military post in the highlands of Lycaonia, where the garrison colony was sharply distinguished in culture and outlook from the native population, which was pagan, uneducated, and superstitious. Under the influence of a miracle of healing, the people had prepared a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas whom they regarded as gods. The *genius* of the place led their thoughts in this direction, for there was a legend to the effect that in the adjacent Phrygian country, when heaven was not so far away, Zeus and Hermes (Jupiter and Mercury) had appeared to mortal men. Probably this story was at the back of their minds. And the sacrifice was in actual preparation when the apostles, shocked at the idolatry, rushed out exclaiming, 'Men, what is this you are doing? We are but human, with natures like your own. The glad news we are preaching to you is to turn from such futile ways to God, the Living One, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them. In bygone days He allowed all nations to go their own ways, though as the Bountiful Giver He did not leave Himself without a witness, giving you rain from heaven and frutiful seasons, giving you food and joy to your heart's content.' This early apologetic to an uninstructed and elementary paganism has for us lessons of its own concerning missionary methods to the regions beyond, and, with this, something to be deeply pondered by those who work among estranged populations at home.

II

The Missionary Method at Lystra

The method at Lystra differs from that employed among the Greek philosophers. In rustic Lycaonia Paul preached the elementary truths of natural religion, and found the witness of God as the hymn finds it—

> Where harvests ripen, Thou art there,
> Who givest all.

But he does not stereotype his method. At Athens he lays the emphasis on the witness of God in Conscience and History. Both are equally valid and of permanent significance.

This side of Paul's preaching it has sometimes been the custom to decry as ineffective, and to set up a false antithesis between the Gospel to Athens (or Lystra) and that to Corinth—'I determined among you to be ignorant of everything except Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ the Crucified' (1 Cor. ii. 2). But the contradiction is imagined, as 'among you' indicates; Paul preaches to the needs and temper of the several places. Besides, *was* the Athens discourse ineffective?—'Some men however did join him and believe, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman called Damaris, and some others.' A modern sermon to a learned Society could hardly be called fruitless if such a tale of converts followed. As Dean Inge has said, 'The true religion for each of us is the most spiritual view of reality that we are able to realize and live by. The forms are not and cannot be the same for all; and accusations of infidelity on the one side, and of obscurantism on the other, are out of place.'[1] Variety of method is characteristic of primitive evangelism, and if it be absent from modern methods, where the changes are rung on one or two invariable and exclusive notes, the more's the pity. Preaching Christ is preaching One whose fullness filleth all. The fisher of men has many casts, which may vary as the rivers of human experience. He takes one here, and another there. And in the preaching of the New Testament we have God's plenty and God's variety.

[1] *Wit and Wisdom*, 1.

In a study of the discourse at Lystra we recognize how skilfully its method is adapted for getting the message home. Paul began with men where they were. To him natural things, the glory and the bounty of the world, were the heralds of the King standing at the door. The witness of God was in their midst at Lystra, and he told the Athenians 'He is not far from every one of us.' There is, it has been said, in the mind of man an *awareness* of God, like our awareness of someone moving about in the house, whom we do not see, but whose quiet footfall reveals his presence. Even the uninstructed heart of Paganism is aware of the divinity of things; the starry heaven above, and the 'flower in the crannied wall' speak His name. And even when *we* stop or cut off all communications with God, that is not to say that He ceases to communicate with us; 'I girded thee, though thou hast not known me.'

It fortifies our heart to see how often the Bible writers fall back for comfort and certitude upon the God of Nature. In Amos and in the later chapters of Isaiah this witness of God holds a shining and a regnant place: 'Lift up your eyes on high and behold who hath created these things. . . . Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?' Here we have a call to confidence in His sustaining love and saving might. And we must not forget that such a presentation of the Divine side of the world finds its highest testimony in the method of Jesus Himself. He spoke to men in familiar symbols from the cornfields, the birds, the grass and the flowers, linking them all together in the sweet relations of human life. As Dr G. H. Morrison has said, 'Christ Himself was never weary of so proclaiming the God of Nature: "I thank Thee, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth; He maketh His rain to fall on the evil and the good"' (*The Weaving of Glory*, 154). Natural things are God's advocates; not the only ones, indeed, but they speak both truly and persuasively, and they open the door by which God renews His communications with us when we have broken them off. They stir us into consciousness and awareness of the Power behind the world, and ring the bell of the universe to call the congregation together to listen to the sermon—

Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell . . .
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears.

They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. 'Life is like that garden. Try all its paths, and you meet God.' We cannot for long elude His witness. And in this spirit, Dr Morrison goes on, 'the apostles, following the Master, went out to proclaim a Father-God, who was none other than the God of Nature. He did not leave Himself without a witness, giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons. Nature is never handled scientifically, nor is she treated of æsthetically. Nature is the woven garb of God, whereon we look as on a royal vesture' (*op. cit.*, 155). We are brought, as Wordsworth says, 'into the power and presence of greatness.' The veil is taken away from the face of Nature to reveal an immanent God who is the First and the Last.

But, apart from the Bible treatment of Nature, the point we wish to make here is that Paul bade his audience open the book which they had in their hands: Take and read, take and read. With the same intention Napoleon said to his officers who were talking a cheap infidelity under a night of stars, 'Gentlemen, who made these?' There are witnesses to speak to every listening ear; 'Hear them,' the Apostle urged, and be aware of God.

In Luke's record of the sermon at Lystra there is no appeal to the inner room of religion, which was bound to come later, as it did come through the conversion of Timothy in this same town. But for the present we are given a simple, almost naïve, presentation of a living God. To unlettered farming-folks and field-workers the Gospel came in names and titles they could understand, *e.g.* in Asia Minor the Great God was commonly addressed by His worshippers as 'The God,' the very title Paul uses here.

Further, the sermon does not begin and end with a polemic against paganism; the preacher was a wiser religion-builder than that. For he opens up to his hearers what should have been implicit in their own belief, drawing out its inferences, and restoring the obstructed communications. Paul gained their ear by an *argumentum ad hominem*, an appeal to facts which were within their own knowledge. It is now being recognized in the Mission

Field, and at home, that more use should be made of the method employed at Lystra; Christianity in its earlier approaches to the outsider stands to win, less by opposition to what is imperfect or false, and more by a sympathetic appeal on common ground and in a religious vocabulary which the man in the street can understand.

> It is better to fight for the good
> Than to rail at the ill.

In this sense Dr Donald Fraser of Livingstonia has said, 'I do not think that a missionary wins a people by antagonisms. The efficient evangelist will appreciate every good in other men's faith, and then he will find avenues of approach to the perfect revelation of Christ.' And Dr Moulton adds his testimony, 'The most typical missionaries are now seen to be bending their whole force to a sympathetic understanding of their people's thoughts. Even those who labour among the lowest Animists are no exception to the rule. The majority of missionaries are reported as holding that God has not left Himself without witness in these peoples, and that the missionary must look for the element of good and build upon it. This sympathetic attitude is the attitude of Paul himself at Lystra'; to understand a man's position and its antecedents, and give him the credit of the very best in his belief, faulty though it be. The Lord and Master of us all came not to destroy but to fulfil. It means what the great preachers continually enjoin—Cultivate the wooing note, and do not end on a negative, or, worse, on a polemic.

And besides, we must recognize what Paul in his kindred address at Athens persuades—that men are continually putting out the tentacles of the mind in all directions, seeking, venturing, following after, in their awareness of God; 'seeking for Him on the chance of finding Him in their groping for Him, though indeed He is close to each one of us' (Acts xvii. 27). In Gospel work at home the same persuasions are urgent. The complaint is made that in this respect the Church fails to appreciate or respect the aspirations of the working classes, many of whom, through acute fear of the future, and in the mental stress of a world-upheaval, have lost the faith they had. And in far too many cases we meet them with a difficult religious vocabulary, which to most of them is a foreign language. We fail to put ourselves into touch with their life, and there is no daysman or mediator between them and us. But Paul knew better, and got at men in a thought that was common to him and his audience. To find this common denominator is the urgent need of our time in both social and religious interests. This much requires to be said on the Apostle's method at Lystra, a method which it very much concerns us to understand and appreciate.

III

The Gospel at Lystra

But now we must turn to the substance of the sermon and the message of Natural Religion. What has the world of Nature to tell us about God? While in Athens Paul preached the Light of Revelation and History, here at Lystra he speaks of the Light of Nature. 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.' He began with the Divine nature, not only in reverence for God, but, springing from this, with a deep sense of the worth of man. They are interrelated; 'If the conception of God is high, so generally is that of man, and conversely.' For in his nature man is the image of God, and every religion is classified by the value assigned to the individual (*cf.* Gwatkin, *The Knowledge of God*, i. 256). In paganism religion had lost its chance, because it was overweighted with a faulty conception of God; and even in the earlier stages of the Old Testament faith it is significant that each successive revival of religion had to begin with a revised and new theology, or doctrine of God; from the earliest view up to the sublime conception 'Our Father which art in heaven.' So far from its being unimportant what a man believes—the most pestilent of delusions—Paul starts with what a man is to believe concerning God. His creed determines everything else, including his conscience for moral values. And this *credo* at Lystra is marked by a breadth of view that finds few parallels in the New Testament except in the speech at Athens,—'a typical sermon to the Gentiles'—and in certain statements in the opening chapters of the Epistle to the Romans; but, remarkably enough, it is

anticipated in Malachi: 'For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name is great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense is offered unto my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord' (i. 11). This is the truer and better side of heathen religion, a view which finds expression also in the noble portrait of Cornelius: 'In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is acceptable with him' (Acts x. 35).

While it is true that the natural theology of Lystra is partial and accommodated to the mind of the hearer, it is nevertheless a foundation upon which the temple of religion can be built. God is the Living Benefactor, the bountiful Giver, the God of all grace, who finds His worshippers not in fear but by trust. Such a conception makes us quite sure that we are on the right road to a religion—'He did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, giving you food and joy to your heart's content.' This transforming conception of God as the Giver is the dividing line between the religion of the Bible and that of pagan cults. For in the latter, religion was a strict bargain or contract, and consisted in giving the gods their due according to the prescribed ritual. Against this Paul made his protest at Athens—'He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, for it is He who gives;' and even Lucretius, but with a difference, has the line, 'The nature of the gods needs nothing from us.' To the Lycaonian peasants the Apostle speaks of God who brings men into the relations of grace. That is the bond between us and the faithful Creator, the Greatest that we know, the All-Great and the All-loving too. This is the face of God that Paul unveiled to the people of Lystra, and if we could but look steadily at it, the vision would break hard hearts in a way that the thunders of the Law or the rebukes of the moralist can never do. God lives and gives, and if He is as much interested in us as to give us anything tormenting fears will be cast out. And this is the God of Jesus. Our religion must recover from Him the doctrine of grace—free grace, for in all evangelism which really counts this is the truth that moves the heart. But, alas! in so-called mission services we listen to a great deal of denunciation of sin, mingled with smart words against the Church, and the foibles of Christians; but how little after all do we hear of the grace of God, which is the gospel of Jesus, and the only Gospel—the words of grace that came from His lips. Oh, if we could but recapture His evangelistic note! In the memories of childhood a story lingers to which we often turn for its illustration of Grace. The sister of a sick girl, thinking that a gift of grapes would help the sufferer, came to the palace with money in her hand to buy. But the king's son gave her more than all she asked, pressing her money back into her hands with the beautiful words, 'My father is not a merchant but a King.' This is a story of grace whereof we say that

> Truth embodied in a tale
> May enter in at lowly doors.

But like the men of Lystra we often make God too little; bargaining and contracting defile our thoughts of Him, whereas 'God is paid when man receives.' O to grace how great a debtor! And thus, with Paul, Natural Religion is the key which opens the door to what is higher than itself, to the gifts and graciousness of a living God.

And then the Apostle spoke to his audience of the Patience of God: 'In bygone ages He allowed all nations to go their own ways,' yet He did not leave Himself without a witness. Paul often comes back to this ruling thought in human experience and in the long discipline of history; he told the Athenians that 'such ages of ignorance God overlooked.' The Divine forbearance finds a place also in Romans; sins previously committed during the time of God's forbearance had been passed over (iii. 25). Paul strikes in these utterances his vibrating note of the philosophy of the world's history and purpose. 'All history had a meaning and a moral meaning from first to last.' The witness of God is in that Divine Spirit who has the first and the last word in human affairs.

This high doctrine which ultimately goes deep into the purpose and breadth of the Atonement we cannot discuss here except in as far as the people of Lystra might understand it. But in this respect it certainly laid down a basis for the further gospel Paul must have given them, as the case of Timothy very clearly implies. He begins with Natural Religion, but he is going to tell them of Christ, who is not for this nation or that, for He redeems the

whole race of mankind ; and this long discipline of forbearance and Divine patience is provisional and an anticipation of the reign of grace which is coming, has come, and is still to come. The Cross of Calvary means all that—a redeemed race, what we call the cosmic significance of Jesus Christ.

But the teaching is not speculative so much as practical, and with the inspiration of tenderness touches the deepest notes in life and character. The thought of the Divine forbearance with our unworthy lives—nothing breaks us down like that. With Peter we exclaim, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man O Lord,' or with the good centurion, 'I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof.' And the age in which Paul spoke could understand all that, for it was not altogether or mainly the hard pagan world of the satirist, but a time when the sense of sin and the need of forgiveness throbbed in the pained heart of the Roman world. And we may well believe that in Lystra, as elsewhere, unworthiness of God's gifts made the same poignant reflections and compunctions which it does with ourselves. The Lycaonians, indeed, had their own modes of expression, different from ours, but real when you get to the heart of it—

> O Sacred Head now wounded,
> With grief and shame weighed down.
> . . . . . .
> What language shall I borrow
> To praise Thee, heavenly Friend.

And thus through the open door of Natural Religion we have touched and feel the Consummation of the Ages. The discourse at Lystra speaks the comforting thought of the poet's hymn on Natural Religion—

> There are longings, yearnings, strivings
> For the good they comprehend not ;
> That the feeble hands and helpless,
> Groping blindly in the darkness
> Touch God's right hand in that darkness,
> And are lifted up and strengthened.

W. M. Grant.

The Wonder of the Commonplace

Harvest Thanksgiving

Acts xiv. 17.—'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.'

This is Paul's argument—that God has written *a bit of Himself* into His own world, like a scroll for all men to read. The Apostle knew—none better—the wonderful light men had received in Jesus. But that did not blind him to the dimmer, more fitful, but certain light that had been there before ! 'God had not left himself without witness,' he said, for the intricate processes of Nature, the steady sway of Providence, the sure system of the seasons, and the bounteous provision for human life should have given every reasoning man a glimpse of the being and the beauty of God. Surely, amid God's daily order and care, a man is self-condemned who does not see God's face.

¶ Let the townspeople go to the green fields, see the early flowers, watch the birds and the beasts, and meditate in the silence of the countryside on the greatness of God. They will feel God's presence. For as the years seem to fly there comes upon me a new and lasting impression that there is nothing quite so wonderful as Nature. It draws me, leads me to the Great Master of the Universe.[1]

> These are thy glorious works, Parent of good,
> Almighty ! thine this universal frame,
> Thus wondrous fair : Thyself how wondrous then !
> Unspeakable, who sitt'st above these heavens
> To us invisible, or dimly seen
> In these thy lowest works ; yet these declare
> Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine.[2]

And yet, it is a strange and puzzling fact that the mere study of Nature, as such, is not always a step to finding God, but often a means of losing Him ! Some people are so obsessed with the laws of Nature that they never see the Lawgiver behind them. They are so impressed with the outward law and regularity of the universe that they miss the inward mind and reason which can alone account for the outward facts.

[1] Sir Harry Lauder. [2] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, v. 53.

Spring and harvest, amid the swing of the years, are such common things, and so dreadfully regular and unfailing, that on the one hand we assume them as ordinary, and on the other hand presume that they will go on for ever, with only minor variations.

¶ 'Seeing in winter a tree stripped of its leaves,' writes Brother Lawrence, 'and considering that within a little time the leaves would be renewed, and after that flowers and fruit appear, I received such a high view of the providence and power of God as was never thereafter effaced from my soul.'

This 'taking of things for granted' is the peculiar sin of townspeople. Nowhere is there greater need for a Harvest Thanksgiving than among the dwellers in cities. For one thing, by the comforts and conveniences of town-life, the edges are rubbed off the seasons, and we live on artificial levels. Further, we do not really know the cost of things—not the *price*, but the *cost* in service. We buy our bread at some convenient shop; and few of us even think of the long processes—the labour, the uncertainty, the patience, the faith—by which that loaf of bread is made ours. Everything in modern life, especially in large cities, is so regularized and standardized, by transport and supply, that we, more than other people, learn the tragic habit of taking miracles for granted.

This is an impoverishing thing for our own character. We lose the saving and cleansing sense of wonder and faith. And life has rich meanings only for him who is baptized in wonder. And further, we fail to see what an intricate network of mutual dependence and mutual service our complex modern life is, and how the injury of one part is the injury of the whole. But most of all we fail to see God and God's care behind things, for no man can ever see God in the world, if he takes things for granted.

Let us recall certain ordinary things which, if we see them aright, will make our religious life above the ordinary.

1. To begin with, there is *the astonishing and unvarying regularity of the world* in which God has placed us—a regularity in which and by which we live. Everything in our natural life happens in such prescribed routine that we begin to presume on it all. Century has followed century, generation has followed generation, season has followed season, and, so far as actual recorded history goes, it seems an unbroken and unvarying order. We may account for it how we will; what matters is that we recognize the wonder and mystery of it all. We may talk in learned terms about the order and law of the universe—though our learned terms do little to explain!—but in the last resort, we must simply stand amazed. Life and law are the two things we know best, and the terms oftenest on our lips: and yet law and life are themselves the main mysteries. In speaking of them we may describe, but we never explain.

We are suffering to-day, rather pitifully, from an unbalanced pride that we have torn so many secrets from the Sphinx. But what we really ought to see is the countless horizons beyond. And as we think of the harvest, a symbol of the world's law and order, our attitude as Christians should be one of adoring reverence to Him who is the Creator and Lord, whose ways though so gracious and bounteous are past finding out. 'Worship,' says Carlyle, 'is transcendent wonder.' How can any one worship God fitly who does not wonder?

2. Let us try to realize afresh *how our modern life has come to be what it is.* And, to illustrate this, let us think of a sheaf of wheat such as we place in our churches as a symbol, a sacrament, of the harvest.

If we go back far enough in history, there was a day when there was no wheat in the world, that is, such wheat as we have now. There were only certain varieties of grasses which grew wild on the plains and open spaces. But both Nature and human nature have a wonderful power peculiar to each. On the one hand Nature has this power—the power to vary. Now, when early men in their rude life first practised the agricultural art by a mere scraping of the surface soil, they observed that some of these grasses produced larger heads of seeds than others. Here comes man's power: he selected these larger heads of seed, and sowed them. Again Nature with its genius for variation produced other varieties, with still larger, 'fruitier' heads of seeds. And so the long slow process went on, until it is now quite undoubted that our fine modern varieties of wheat, barley, and oats were produced by these two things—on the one hand, Nature's Divine power

of variation, and on the other hand, man's genius to select and choose the best.

Do we see the romance of this, a romance that holds in its heart the promise of finer things in the future, material and spiritual alike? Wheat, barley, oats—what common things! How ordinary they are! But look beyond them, and see the slow toil of the centuries; see the dreams of good men focussed here, the infinite labour, passion, sacrifice, and science of thousands of seekers now dead, by whose labours we live. See that for a moment, and every trivial thing in the world becomes instinct with glory and with the glamour of romance. These common things are memorials to us of the blood and the brains of forgotten generations, great souls who dreamed dreams for us. What we need is to see them with new eyes, startled eyes. If we could thus see, these grains of wheat, as they rustle and sway in the autumn winds, would hum the song of a poet, or a hymn to the glory of God.

3. And lastly, think of *the complex network of human relations* by which alone our life of comfort and security is made possible—a network of which the harvest is an emblem.

In very ancient days a man did all his own necessary labour. He raised his corn: made his bread: reared his sheep: manufactured his wool: made his cloth: cut his own garments: built his own house. But how different the tale is to-day! For us life is a great complex interwoven network: we depend on a thousand other people for our daily wants. By our modern division of labour, each one of us does only a small selected and often specialized piece of work: and we depend for the supply of our daily wants on people and processes that run like the threads of a spider's web to every corner of the globe. It is the modern way, and perhaps for any articulated life the only way. But the danger is that we, once more, take it all for granted—that we selfishly grasp all that our easy money can buy, and forget the army of toilers who alone make the comfort of modern life in any way possible. We are what we are because of our unknown brethren.

¶ There is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life, from the time when the primeval milkmaid had to wander with the wanderings of her clan, because the cow she milked was one of a herd which had made the pastures bare. Even in that conservatory existence where the fair Camellia is sighed for by the noble young Pine-apple, neither of them needing to care about the frost or rain outside, there is a nether apparatus of hot-water pipes liable to cool down on a strike of the gardeners or a scarcity of coal.[1]

We shall be cursed with social sins and social disasters until we recognize how mutually dependent and serviceable we all are to each other. Aloofness, coldness, indifference and superiority are not only the worst Christian sins, but also the worst social sins. What we need to learn is the lesson of Jesus, that none of us stands or falls to himself alone, that love is the Great Solvent of the world's problems, and that it is the girdle of sympathy in the Love of God that alone holds the big world together.

The Witness to God in the Gifts of Nature

Harvest Thanksgiving

Acts xiv. 17.—'He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.'

These words were said by Paul and Barnabas to the heathen people of Lystra. These missionaries had cured a lame man, and the people had forthwith concluded that they must be gods, and had been preparing to offer them Divine honours. Paul and Barnabas, greatly troubled at this wrong impression which their deed of kindness had produced, hastened to preach to these heathen people about the one true God to whom alone man's worship is due. And they called them to see a witness, an evidence, of that God in the works of Nature, whereby provision is made of man's daily life. These words state, in a very simple way, the argument for God from the gifts of Nature to man.

Now the great question about God is never really the question whether He exists, but always the question what kind of God exists. Every one believes in God—some originating and sustaining power behind all the universe of things and circumstances. But of what kind is this power?

We are now concerned with that one department of knowledge, the knowledge of the facts

[1] George Eliot.

forward to its crown and completion that witness to God which Nature speaks out—how He is the one God of all light and life, always present in all His creation, working with perfect faithfulness, gentle and patient in His ways, and seeking always to do good even to those who treat Him with ingratitude.

Let us give Him our heart's thankfulness and offer ourselves in consecration to His service.

Strength through Weakness

Acts xiv. 19.—'And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.'

In the course of his hazardous life Paul suffered many persecutions, yet this stoning at Lystra stands out by itself. No other left him as dead, and it would appear that he suffered from it permanent bodily injury. But the deep impression it left on his mind was due still more to the experiences which followed it and their effect upon the whole course of his ministry.

When he says, some years after, that he still bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus, he must have meant that his injuries were both grave and permanent; but, unless he had regarded them as also having wrought some deep and lasting spiritual change, he would not have referred them so solemnly to the Lord Jesus. That spiritual change may be summed up in his own words. He learned that when he was weak, then he was strong. It was one experience, but his whole later experience was determined by three particular applications of it—first to himself, second to his method, and third to his gospel.

1. *Its Application to Himself.*—In the first place it revealed to St Paul his true self. In Paul, as in us, there were two men. And, like us too, he sometimes failed to distinguish them. The natural man had great qualities; and, as he speaks of being consecrated to his task from his mother's womb, he manifestly did not regard them as evil. He was a man of warm affections and possibly of quick temper. Intellectually he loved subtleties and excelled in debate. A difficult problem always awoke his interest; and he was easy to draw into the mazes of theology. He was a born pioneer; and he was ambitious to succeed in what he undertook. Almost the only tradition of him which may be authentic speaks of his personal magnetism over all he met, in striking contrast to the first effect of his personal appearance. Even from Acts we gather the impression of a man who never failed to rouse violent opposition where he failed to win the most devoted friendship; and the frequency with which he wrought mighty works, that is, miraculous cures, itself proves a dominating influence upon the minds of men. His speech and bearing and working made men think him and Barnabas gods, which at least speaks of an extraordinary quality and power.

Men saw a brilliant and successful leader of a new movement, but the new man in Christ Jesus, to whom all things had become new by a great gentleness and patience and loving-kindness, was obscured to the world, and even to his disciples, and perhaps even to himself. The vehemence of his protest when he was mistaken for a god may speak of a commotion in his own soul, caused by a glimpse into the abyss of his own thoughts, as well as by reprobation of the idolatry.

¶ There could not but be peril in a life so crowded as Collier's; fortunately, he knew it, and therein lay his safeguard. He was walking home one day with a younger preacher, whose popular gifts were just beginning to attract large crowds: 'I say, ——,' he said, 'have you ever thought of that text, *Great multitudes came together to hear. But He withdrew Himself in the deserts, and prayed*'? [1]

The next day taught Paul the worthlessness of this domination. The man who yesterday was hailed as a god was to-day stoned like a dog and flung outside the city wall. He came back to consciousness, but it was to the consciousness of being a different person. The broken man who was helped away was no longer one who loved the arena, overwhelmed in debate, bore down opposition by his moral vehemence, and dominated by his spiritual energy. But a new man appeared, who was a new manifestation of Christ, whom his converts received as a messenger of God, even as Jesus Himself. They learned that true strength and victory were of gentleness and patience, and they discerned a spirit which, by turning evil to good, was more

[1] *Collier of Manchester*, 164.

than conqueror over all earthly ills. They saw, in short, the man for whom eloquence was sounding brass, and prophecy and miracles and martyrdom profitless without love. And, as this won all hearts, he had surely a right to glory in his afflictions.

If any quality has commanded the reverence of our generation it is efficiency, the efficiency of health, vigour, mental resource, confidence, organizing talent, commanding influence which commands success. But is there not a deeper, more lasting efficiency, with power over the hearts and not merely the bodies of men, having in it the might to make all things new, to be won only by the weakness which reveals to us a strength not to be crushed by all the brute forces of the world? Is not the truly efficient person, in the end, the new man in Christ Jesus, who knows how to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things, and who thereby turns evil into good, and all the uncertainties of life into the unchanging purpose of God?

2. *Its Application to his Method.*—In the second place, it revealed to St Paul his true method. We have already seen something of his original method. If we look at the narrative a little more closely, we also see the plan on which he meant to carry it through. The mission had begun in Cyprus, the native country of Barnabas. From the direction of their journey, it was apparently meant to end in Cilicia, the native country of Paul. It was characteristic of their courage, or rather of their faith, thus to face first those who knew them best. At Lystra Cilicia was not far away, but the journey through the mountains was impossible for a broken man. One cannot be stoned by an infuriated mob and flung out as dead without serious injuries. Paul does not say much about them, but what he says is full of meaning. His converts, he declares, would have been ready to pluck out their eyes and give them to him. The inference is that he was subject to at least attacks of blindness. He further describes his infirmity as of a nature his converts might have been tempted to despise or spit out. That seems to indicate attacks of an epileptic type, it being an ancient custom to spit as a means of averting from the spectator the evil spirit which was thought to cause them. Such blinding attacks could easily be caused by a lesion which made him at first seem to be dead.

The Paul who returned was in no danger of being mistaken for a god. There could be no more debates in the synagogues, no more eloquent appeals, no more publicity of any kind. Between the times Paul spent in pain and Barnabas in care of him they devoted themselves privately to their converts. We read that they confirmed the souls of the brethren, exhorted them to continue in the faith, appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, commending them to the Lord on whom they had believed. But, then, for the first time, we also read that they made many disciples and could begin to speak of the conversion of the Gentiles. This was the triumph of a new method, more quiet, more personal, more simply religious. The Apostle, it is true, did not abandon the old when he found it useful; he could still argue when argument was called for. But it was perhaps in those days when he bore so painfully in his body what he calls the owner's marks of the Lord Jesus that he formed the habit of mind which made him afterwards so constantly describe himself as the slave of Jesus Christ, and consider himself every other person's slave for His sake. And a like effect of his weakness appeared in his new method.

In intimate intercourse, in the exchange of hopes and fears, in the quiet influence of faith upon faith and character upon character, in fellowship and united prayer, in discovering those who could guide and teach and create a spirit of mutual trust and helpfulness, in forming small societies to be a leaven of the Kingdom of God in the great world of heathenism, he found the true method of service into which he was henceforth to pour the whole wealth of his nature.

If the call should come to us, we too may not shrink from the way of argument and public appeal and affirmation of our convictions, but must follow it with such courage and success as our faith and spiritual power make possible for us. We too must face the charge of being among those who turn the world upside down, should our day demand that of us. Yet our true hope of amending the world is in another method, the method of being the servant of Christ in the service of all men.

¶ In his autobiography Stanley says of Livingstone: 'He preached no sermon by

word of mouth while I was in company with him, but each day of my companionship with him witnessed a sermon acted. Lowly of spirit, meek in speech, merciful of heart, pure in mind, peaceful in act. Suspected by the Arabs to be an informer and therefore calumniated . . . yet bearing no ill-will. Cursed by marauders yet physicking their infirmities, most despitefully used yet praying daily for all manner and condition of men. Had my soul been of brass and my heart of spelter, the powers of my head had surely compelled me to recognize with due honour the spirit of Goodness which manifested itself in him. Had there been anything of the Pharisee or the hypocrite in him, had I traced any meanness or guile in him, I had surely turned away a sceptic. But my every study of him during health and sickness deepened my reverence. His life was an evidence that he served God with all his heart.'

3. *Its Application to his Gospel.*—In the third place, it revealed to St Paul his true gospel. The new man is himself the true method, and the new method is itself the true gospel. The essence of it is that, when we are weak in ourselves, then are we strong in God, that, when we discover the worthlessness of the world for our own dominion, we discover its value for God's Kingdom.

Even in his most argumentative speeches Paul aimed at true faith and never at mere intellectual refutation. But his earlier speeches tended to increase the danger of Christianity becoming merely one of the many movements of thought which, at that time, were causing great commotion, but effecting little spiritual change. Even when Paul spoke of the Crucifixion, men would not necessarily discern that it was a new view of God and of life and of the true uses of the world. They could still have thought of it as a mere momentary triumph of wickedness in the midst of a revelation of might and glory, with its meaning the assurance that such moments do not last for ever. But in his suffering and weakness Paul struck a deeper note. The faith in which his disciples were exhorted to continue could no longer be mistaken for faith in a glorious triumph of Divine power, but was now, beyond all possibility of misunderstanding, faith in a Kingdom to be entered only through much tribulation. Then he knew that the Cross of Christ is the eternal meaning of a Kingdom which is a righteousness that is not mere well-doing, a peace that is not mere ease, a joy that is not mere fleeting pleasure.

Though the world is only for the manifestation of God's Kingdom, His Kingdom is not of this world. To save us from making this present fleeting world our kingdom, we must suffer disappointment with it at every turn. As the true purpose and blessedness even of this world lie beyond it, we may never hope to find them in it. The realities of life do not change. The Cross of Christ is still their sole interpretation. We truly gain the world only as, through it, the world is crucified to us and we to the world. The price of the highest must be paid, and it is opposition, and condemnation, and poor success, and inward conflict, and the patience of faith and the service of love.

We have no need to seek trials of our own making, we have no right to fail in any enterprise through our own discouragement or slackness, but we may not escape trial by taking an easy road or secure success by aiming low. The difficult road and the high aim alone lead into the Kingdom.

The Key to Experience

Acts xiv. 27.—'And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed what great things [1] the Lord had done for them.'

NOTHING reveals a man so much as the kind of record he keeps in his mind of the experiences of life, no matter how life may have treated him. And nothing better illustrates the kind of man Paul was than this word which describes his account of his first journey as a missionary of Christ. He and Barnabas had been sent away from Antioch some months before to be pioneers of the gospel in distant and dangerous places, and break new ground for Christ. When they came back from that journey they gathered the Church together and rehearsed 'what great things the Lord had done for them.'

This is one of those revealing flashes which

[1] Phrase translated as in Gospels.

light up a man's soul. For when we read the account of the journey we see that Paul might have laid emphasis on a good many other things. They had had many trying times. Again and again the fury of a great mob was let loose against them, and they had been driven out of one city after another. They were often footsore and weary and met with many a cold reception. To crown everything, the people of Lystra stoned Paul so badly that he was drawn for dead out of the city. Many a man could have made quite a doleful tale out of it all, and at least given such a recital of his troubles as would have left the impression that he was something of a hero or a martyr, or both. But that was not Paul's way. When they had done sketching their story, it was the face of *God* that shone out of the picture. They forgot all the hardships and the weariness in one splendid and glowing memory of the great things which God had done for them.

Here, in Paul's report of what had happened on his journey, we have a lesson on the right emphasis of life. Does it not suggest to us that if a man have the right spirit, no matter what his experiences have been, there will be something good to tell about life, something encouraging, something to raise a song about, even though it be a song in the night, and in the darkest day some light be found if we will look for it? Does it not suggest that in the hardest and bitterest experience there are rays of hope, and gleams of the comfort and consolation of God? Whatever life may have brought us through, there is always enough to thank God for; there are always the Divine compensations.

¶ I had now brought my state of life to be much easier in itself than it was at first, and much easier to my mind, as well as to my body. I frequently sat down to my meat with thankfulness, and admired the hand of God's providence which had thus spread my table in the wilderness. I learned to look more upon the bright side of my condition, and less upon the dark side, and to consider what I enjoyed rather than what I wanted; and this gave me sometimes such secret comforts that I cannot express them; and which I take notice of here, to put those discontented people in mind of it, who cannot enjoy comfortably what God has given them, because they see and covet something that He has not given them. All our discontents about what we want appeared to me to spring from the want of thankfulness for what we have.[1]

There came a cloud; it fell in shining showers.
Lo! from the earth sprang troops of radiant flowers.

Grief o'er a joyous heart its shadow threw.
Lo! in the darkness love's sweet graces grew.

The golden sun dropped sudden out of sight.
Lo! silver stars made glorious the night.

Death came. The soul, affrighted at its guise,
Was led protesting into Paradise.[2]

Now this brings us to the point of the whole matter. What is it that gives a man like Paul this kind of optimism and gladness, so that he is always able to pick out the best, and always able in the darkest day to see some gleam of light from heaven itself? It did not mean that his nature was so constituted that he was impervious to trouble. It was not because Paul did not feel 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' that he said nothing about them, and only 'rehearsed what great things God had done for him.' It was because he had caught and held to his heart God's gracious purpose and made that his own. He had seen that purpose working in two directions, both in him and through him—in him for himself and through him for the world. He had seen that purpose in Jesus, and to his Christ-illumined mind the world had become the sphere of God's creative and redeeming action. With that new vision in his heart he had gone out into the world to watch it working through everything, and to ally himself and all his powers of faith and courage and self-sacrifice with its operations. The man who will do that finds himself living in a transformed world. The whole universe of experience, rough or smooth, storm or sunshine, life or death, becomes a mighty conspiracy of the Divine Love.

[1] *Robinson Crusoe.*
[2] *Sunday Afternoon Verses,* edited by W. Robertson Nicoll.

Let us try to look with Paul's eyes as he so interpreted his experience that it seemed full of the great things of God.

1. Let us see that the great things God does for us are what He does *in* us. The purpose of God in the world is neither our happiness nor our comfort but our character. We are here that God may make something of us as moral and spiritual beings. Paul had that fixed deep in his soul. He was here on this earth not for what he could make or enjoy or win from the point of view of material success, but for what Christ could make of him. The moment he had that truth fixed in his soul, accepting it and consenting to it with all his being, a great change came over the face of experience. Many things lost their significance at once. They simply did not matter. A few stones falling on his body here or there did not matter. A few nights' sleep lost did not matter. What the Jews said about him by way of relieving their minds did not matter. The thing that did matter was how he bore himself when these things were going on. Did he keep a brave heart or did he play the coward when they stoned him? Did he keep his temper sweet and gentle or give way to a bitter and revengeful mood when they flung their jibes at him? Did he stand true amid everything, true to his faith, true to the little company who had chosen him to go and who were praying for him away back in Antioch? That was the thing that mattered! And if his courage rose and his faith grew clearer and sweeter, as it did, what was the explanation? Surely it was just God doing great things for him, working into his soul shining strands of patience and courage and Christian manliness, and working out of it by that same process all taint of pride and self-satisfaction and every sort of subtle selfishness which might have made him of less use to God and men. It was these works of redeeming love that God was doing in him of which Paul was thinking.

¶ One to whom he often spoke of the deepest things of life and of death will never forget his saying one day just after the attack of illness in December: 'I have come to see that cleverness, success, attainment, count for little; that goodness, or, as F. (naming a dear friend) would say, "*character*," is the important factor in life.'[1]

[1] *Life and Letters of George John Romanes*, 323.

Is not this the right way of judging life's experiences? The great things God does for us are not the things He does outside of us—His providential guidance, deliverances from danger and the like, the gifts that life is always bringing to us so wonderfully. The great things God does for us are done within us, in the effect of these experiences upon our natures. Do our experiences pass within to do the work which God's Spirit can enable them to do, leaving us, when they have gone, with some new grace of courage, some larger vision of God, some deeper sympathy with man, some surer mastery of life? The question of life's success is not what we have made of it, but what it has made of us!

¶ Dr Butler, headmaster of Harrow, wrote, after the death of Matthew Arnold's eldest son at the age of sixteen: 'His life was strangely unlike that which we assume to be characteristic of the ordinary schoolboy. An invalid from his birth, unable to take a part in active games, unable even to study hard, shut out from all those competitions of mind and body which make up so much of the relish of life, he had learnt to be patient and unselfish, and to care for the things of God.' After noting the passionate earnestness with which the boy threw himself into the one school occupation which he could call his own—his dearly loved music—and also his care to check all unfairness in work in his form, the headmaster added: 'When I think of the little that such a boy could do, and of the effort which it must have cost *him* to do anything at all instead of simply following the stream, it seems as though we might reverently apply to him the precious words of Divine approval: "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."'[1]

2. But again, Paul recognized that the great things of life are the things which God does *through* us. No doubt it was upon these he dwelt even more than the other—how the cripple was healed, and the devils were driven out, and the light of the gospel message kindled the flame of faith and love in every town he had visited. It is a great story, which thrills us even now as we read it. Is there any greater thing God can do for a man than to make him the channel of inspiration and the instrument

[1] *Letters of Matthew Arnold*, vol. i.

of help and healing to the world about him? There is a phrase used in the business world to describe men whose work is of vital importance to several branches of an industry. They are called 'pivotal' men. That was Paul's position. He was a pivotal man, upon whose influence and faith the conversion of hundreds revolved, and a whole race of men and women swung into the light of faith and hope. Now that is the position in which every Christian man stands to his fellows in some degree. He is a vital point in the line of God's communications with the world around him. He is a vital link in the chain of God's redeeming purpose. Others are depending on him for the right attitude to life. Others are swinging into the line of God's grace upon the pivot of his influence, consciously or unconsciously. Is there any greater thing God can do for any man than to make him capable of such a post?

¶ 'I know not,' wrote John Cairns to Sir William Hamilton, his teacher, 'what lives may lie before me, but on to the ending end of them I shall bear your mark upon me.'

If this be so, will it not cast a new light upon many of the darker experiences of life—the waste places of sorrow or pain? Would it not reconcile us to much that is very bitter if we could see in it God's method of equipping us for this task of blessing, and setting us in the place where we could be most useful? Does not our pain take on a new meaning when we see in it God's opportunity of revealing to our souls that grace wherewith we may 'comfort others with the comfort by which we are comforted of Him'?

¶ 'I carry about a "stricken heart" myself. Only last summer a great grief fell suddenly upon me. He who was once a "Man of Sorrows" has wonderfully upheld me, making my darkness light with His Presence. And I think He will allow me the joy of comforting other mourners, humbly pointing them to Him who was sent on purpose "to bind up the broken-hearted."'[1]

[1] *The Life of Handley Carr Glyn Moule*, 179.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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